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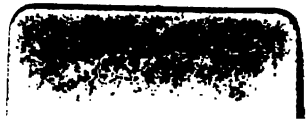

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FRANK A. MUNSEY.

UNDER FIRE

A TALE OF NEW ENGLAND VILLAGE LIFE

BY

FRANK A. MUNSEY

NEW YORK
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1897

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FRANK A. MUNSEY

UNDER FIRE.

I.

"WELL, Dave, it was a close game, but we managed to save ourselves after all their talk," said Tom Martin, referring to a baseball match of the previous day.

"Yes, but thanks to our lucky stars that Fred Worthington was with us. If John Rexford had kept him at the store, as I was afraid, we should have been badly beaten."

"He didn't play the whole game, did he?" asked Tom sarcastically.

"Of course not," retorted Dave Farrington, with some warmth, "but you know very well we should have lost it, if it had not been for him. If he saved us from defeat, why not be fair and give him credit for it? I am sure he would do as much for you if the case were reversed."

"I didn't say anything against him."

"No; but you don't appear to say anything for him."

"Why should I?"

"Well, I can say frankly that his playing was

equal to that of some professionals that I have seen. The factory boys couldn't get the hang of his pitching, and the best batters fouled nearly every ball."

"Don't you want some credit for catching?" asked Tom, with a view to turning the conversation from Fred.

"Yes, but——" Here the conversation was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Matthew De Vere, a rather foppishly dressed boy, who showed very clearly by his manner that he considered himself the "swell young man" of the town.

"Oh, boys, I have a bit of good news for you," he cried. "Guess what it is."

"Anything startling?" asked Tom.

"No; but it is something you and Dave will both like."

"Tell us what it is. We give it up, don't we, Dave?"

"Grace Bernard is going to have a party—a birthday party."

"A party?" echoed Dave. "Who told you?"

"My sister Annie just came from Mr. Bernard's and said so."

"When is it to be?" chimed in both boys eagerly.

"Next Thursday evening," answered their informant.

"Well, that strikes me about right," replied Tom, with evident pleasure at the prospect. "How old is Grace, I wonder?"

"She will be sixteen next Thursday," returned Matthew.

"I'm glad some one has life enough to wake us up a little. I'm hungry for a 'racket,'" put in Dave. "The evenings are getting long, and it is too cold to rove about much. Three cheers, I say, for Grace Bernard! I speak for the first waltz with her."

The cheers were given with a will, for the mere mention of a party, the first one of the season, was sufficient to make the boys enthusiastic.

"I wonder who will be invited," said Matthew; and then added, with a scowl, "well, I don't care who is if Fred Worthington only gets left; *I hate him.* He tries to push himself ahead too much for a fellow in his circumstances, and since he has gone into John Rexford's store he is worse than ever."

"I don't know why he should not be invited as well as any of us," said Dave Farrington. "He is certainly one of the smartest boys in the village, both at his books and at whatever else he undertakes; and the fact that his father is a poor man ought not to be against him;" then, with a sly wink at Tom, he added, "and you may be

certain he won't be overlooked, for he and Nellie Dutton are getting to be very good friends, and of course Grace Bernard will ask him on her account, if for no other reason."

Now Matthew liked Nellie Dutton himself, and like most rich boys (his father was a retired sea captain and president of the Mapleton National Bank), could ill bear the deprivation of anything which his fancy craved. Therefore the thought that a poor fellow, like Fred Worthington, might come between him and the object of his fancy was exceedingly disagreeable.

This was one reason why he "hated" Fred; the other was, he could not lord it over him, as he did over most of the Mapleton boys, for Fred had a will of his own, as well as a perfect physical development, which convinced Matthew, bully as he was, that it would not be well to grapple with him.

Dave's remark was a sharp one, and had the effect of bringing the color to Matthew's face, though he strove hard to hide his confusion.

Both boys noticed this, and Tom, who was always ready for fun, even at the expense of a friend, said:

"Yes, I saw Fred walk home with Nellie from Sunday school last week; and it seems to me he has to go up to her father's rather often with goods from the store. I guess the doctor will

have quite a bill to pay at Rexford's, unless Fred makes two or three trips up there to carry what he might take in one. But never mind, Matthew, school will soon commence; then you will have the advantage of him, for he will be in the store."

Matthew grew decidedly angry at these remarks, and said somewhat savagely:

"I'll have the advantage of him without waiting for school, now you mark my words."

"How are you going to get it?" asked Tom.

"You just wait and you will see. I don't tell everything I know."

"Fred has a big muscle," suggested Tom, "and they say he can use his hands pretty lively, too."

"There is no need of informing De Vere on that point," remarked Dave, "for it isn't very long since he and Fred gave a little exhibition at school."

"Come, Mat, tell us all about it," said Tom. "I never heard of that before."

"I won't tell you anything," answered De Vere gruffly; "he can't put on airs with me any more; and if he goes to that party and pays any attention to Nellie Dutton, he will get into trouble."

"If Nellie wants his attention she will be pretty sure to have it, for you can't frighten him

—he isn't easily scared," remarked Dave, in a way that irritated Matthew.

"I should say not," said Tom, with a sly wink at Dave, "and judging from appearances Nellie is as pleased with his attentions as he is with her company."

But Matthew possessed a good share of conceit, and knowing Nellie to be quite friendly to himself, he imagined that his advantage over Fred would be so great that he could readily monopolize the attention of the young lady in question, and therefore replied with more assurance:

"There is no fear of her bothering with him, for I propose to take up her time pretty well myself;" and then he added in language that was a perfect index to his character, "say, boys, if Worthington should be there, let's make it so uncomfortable for him that he will never show himself again at one of our parties. We can occupy the attention of the girls, so they will leave him alone to slink into the corner and hate himself, while we enjoy the waltz and make fun of him. If you will only do this, I hope he will be there, just to let all see how awkward he is among his betters."

Some other boys here joined the group, and the conversation was broken off. But Dave Farrington took occasion to remark in an undertone to Tom:

"If Mat De Vere and a dozen more just like him should try to keep the girls away from Fred Worthington, they'd find a big contract on their hands; and the one who 'hated himself' would not be Fred, either. Just wait till the party comes off, then look out for fun."

II.

MAPLETON is a good type of a New England village, showing everywhere plentiful evidences of thrift and energy.

Of course it has a manufacturing industry of some sort, or it could hardly be a New England village; and the chief building of Mapleton, in this line, is a large woolen factory that employs about three hundred hands. There are also a number of minor industries, together with stores, churches, and school houses. It is not a large town, there being, perhaps, three thousand inhabitants all told.

Among so small a number one might suppose that the people would mingle freely, and that exclusiveness would not thrive. At the time of which I am writing it did not thrive to any great extent; still, it was there, and showed itself principally in the refusal of the "town's people," so called, to associate with the "factory folks."

Exceptions were made, however, in the case of the head officers of the company, and the overseers of certain departments of the mill, who, by virtue of their positions, which brought them in

a liberal salary, were graciously welcomed to the homes of the villagers.

These two branches of society had their different "sets." That of the "villagers" was made up, as is usually the case, by the drawing together of the well to do, the influential, and the better educated citizens, while the others were left to form such social connections as their opportunities afforded.

Fred Worthington's parents mingled with the latter class, for they were far from rich. His father was a shoemaker, and earned only a small sum weekly; but through the excellent management of his mother, they had a neat and comfortable home.

During Fred's younger days he thought nothing of these dividing lines of society; but as he had grown to be, as he considered, a young man—and, indeed, he really did possess more of that enviable bearing than most boys at the age of sixteen—he had come to realize that there was such a thing as a social difference between men whose Maker created them equal.

This fact impressed him more forcibly since he found that some of his companions with whom he had grown up, played, and studied side by side in school for years, were now apparently beginning to ignore him.

"Is there any reason for this?" he often asked

himself. "Have they suddenly accomplished some great thing, or done some heroic deed which gives them distinction? Or is the trouble with me? If so, where does it lie? Surely I stood among the very first in my class at school —far ahead of Matthew De Vere and his sister, and some of the others who treat me so coolly. I wonder if clerking in a store is disgraceful? I always thought it an honorable thing to be a merchant. Merchants are everywhere among our most influential men.

"I have always kept good company," he reflected, "and never had trouble with any of the boys, except Matthew De Vere, just before I left school, and that wasn't my fault. I taught him a lesson, though, that I think he will remember, and ever since then he has been trying to pay me for it by turning the girls and boys against me; but only a few of them have shown any change.

"I know my father and mother do not belong to the same 'set' as theirs, but that is no reason why they should slight me, and *it shall not be.* I will work my way up and make them acknowledge me if it takes years to do it. But as long as Nellie Dutton and some others are friendly, I don't care so much."

When Fred heard of the party to be given by Grace Bernard, he was in a feverish state of suspense, wondering whether he would be invited

or not. He felt that this was a crisis with him.

He had left school, but he argued that if he were only fortunate enough to attend this party, he would be placed on a good social footing, one that he could maintain as he gradually built himself up in the store; but should luck now go against him, he would be practically separated from many of his school companions, and separation meant disaster to a certain friendship that he prized more highly than all the rest, and which, as he believed, it would not be well to leave uncultivated even for a short time.

"Hello, Fred, got your invitation yet?" asked Dave, a few days before that fixed upon for the party.

"No, I haven't seen anything of it. Have you had yours?"

"Oh, yes; got it yesterday. I don't see where yours is though."

"It looks as if I were to be left out, Dave," replied Fred, with an assumed air of cheerfulness.

"That can't be. There is plenty of time. Don't worry."

This was a little reassuring, and Fred tried to believe it to be so—tried hard—but it looked to him, nevertheless, as if his case were a hopeless one.

For he reflected that the unfed fire soon

dies, while that which is kept alive even by the smallest spark may at some time become a glowing blaze. But his fears were all for nothing, as in due time the much looked for invitation arrived.

On the eventful night our hero dressed with care and taste, giving his youthful locks especial attention, as all boys of his age do whenever they go into company, and then hastened to Dave's home to go with him to the party.

The large double parlors of Mr. Bernard's house were well filled with girls, about Grace's own age, when the two boys arrived. After the latter had disposed of their coats and hats, and had taken a final look to see that each particular hair was in its proper place, they entered the main parlor rather shyly.

"Good evening, Dave," said Grace. "I'm glad you came early, for nearly all the girls are here, and I hope you will help entertain them; and here is Fred," she added, extending her hand to him. "I am very glad you came. I have hardly spoken with you since you left school, but I see the store life has not taken away your color yet."

If Fred had a good share of color to begin with, it was not lessened by this remark. However, he managed to keep his presence of mind, and replied heartily:

"No, I hope not, but allow me to congratulate you on your birthday, for you are looking your best. I hope you may have many happy returns of the occasion."

Some one else blushed now, and evidently enjoyed the compliment, which Fred had managed very well, as indeed he ought to have done, for he had repeated it to himself at least forty five times that afternoon.

"I didn't know you could say such nice things, Fred, but I don't half believe you mean it," rejoined Grace. "But there is Nellie all alone on the sofa. Come with me and take a seat beside her; you two must entertain each other while I receive Matthew and Tom, and some others who I see have just come in."

"I was afraid something would happen so that you couldn't come," said Nellie, as he took her proffered hand.

"I couldn't very easily stay away," he replied, sitting down beside her.

"Why, how funny! And why not?" she inquired, trying to suppress a blush.

"The evening promised to be such an enjoyable one," he answered; "and yet I hardly dared to anticipate such good fortune as I have met with thus far."

"Oh, Fred, you are learning to flatter, I do believe! I didn't think that of you."

"If flattery is saying what one truly means, then I am flattering you; for if I had arranged my own program, you and I would occupy about the same positions as we do now. It couldn't suit me better, and I only hope you are as well pleased," he added.

"I believe you and Grace arranged this together," she answered evasively, "without saying anything to me. I must scold her;" and she partially covered her face with her fan, which seemed to mean that she was well satisfied.

"I am sure I had nothing to do with the arrangement. I must thank Grace for it, and I hope you won't scold her very hard, as this is her birthday; but before it is too late let me ask you if you will favor me with the first dance?"

"Oh, with pleasure," she replied, but at the same time she wondered if he knew the dance. She had never heard of his dancing, but the first part of the opening one was to be a march, and she knew he could take part in that, even if they had to drop out of the waltz later on.

"Good evening, Nellie," said Matthew, who now came up and extended his hand, adding, with an air of assurance, "I see the music is ready to start, shall we not lead the march?"

"Thank you, but I am already engaged for that," she returned, casting her eyes towards Fred.

"Then you won't march with me?" he asked, flushing with evident anger at the rebuff.

"I must keep my engagement," she replied.

"Keep your engagement with a *stick*," he rejoined, and walked away with a look of contempt on his face.

The last remark made young Worthington's blood boil, but he had the good sense to take no apparent notice of it, though he fixed it well in his memory for future use.

De Vere seated himself in a remote corner—the place he had expected to see Fred occupy—and looked sullenly on as the march progressed, but evidently with some degree of pleasure at the utter failure he felt sure our hero would make. In this again he was doomed to disappointment; for to his surprise and chagrin he found his rival quite at home in the waltz. He and Nellie were unmistakably the most graceful as well as the best looking couple on the floor.

But Matthew was not the only surprised one present. Dave looked on with amazement, and Nellie hardly seemed to believe her own senses.

"Why, Fred, when did you learn to dance so well?" she asked, as they walked around the room arm in arm. "I never had a better partner."

"Thank you, Nellie, for the compliment," he replied, with a slight blush. "I only hope I

managed to get through without exhausting your patience. I was so afraid I should prove very stupid, I know so little about the waltz."

"Oh, no, you were far from stupid, and I never enjoyed a dance more; but I am awfully curious to know where you learned so much without attending dancing school."

"'Never enjoyed a dance more,' and with me, too," thought Fred, with a delight which he could not conceal.

"My cousin from Boston, the young lady who spent the summer at my home, taught me all I know about it," he replied.

"And have you never had any other practice?"

"No, that was all."

"Well, she must have been an excellent teacher, and you as good a scholar as you always were at school."

Presently the music ceased, and Dave, Grace, and others came up and congratulated Fred upon his waltzing, and Nellie on her partner.

The party as a whole was a great success, and passed off gayly. It had no feature to distinguish it from others of its kind in country towns. This particular event has been briefly referred to, because, as a consequence of it, something occurred that most cruelly clouded Fred Worthington's young days, and changed the whole course of his life.

III.

DE VERE saw plainly that, in spite of his endeavors to injure Fred, the latter was more of a favorite than himself. He supposed that he had accomplished something of his design before the party took place, but there he found that the result of his malicious endeavors practically extended only as far as his sister.

Indeed, he almost fancied that his thrusts had been turned against himself, for no one seemed to care for him especially. He was very moody and sulky at his disappointment. He had overestimated his strength and importance, as boys of his stamp always do; moreover, he thought Nellie treated him very coolly, and it is just possible that she did, as her time was fully taken up by another person, and the mere absence of attention on her part was sufficient to make Matthew sullen and disagreeable.

This sourness was noticed by all, and they left him to himself, pretty much as he had hoped to see them treat his rival. The tables were fairly turned upon him, as he could not fail to see. But he had intimated that if Fred attended this

party, and matters went a certain way, he would have his revenge.

He resolved to carry out this threat, and so passed a great part of the evening in mischievous plotting.

When it was time for the party to break up, notwithstanding the fact that he had behaved so rudely and had not participated in any of the games, or other forms of amusement, he gathered himself together, approached Miss Nellie, and proposed to serve as her escort.

But Nellie answered, with a demure look and a twinkle in her eye, that another young gentleman had kindly offered to do her that favor.

It is said that under certain conditions even a straw may break a camel's back, but this refusal of Nellie's was no straw to Matthew. It was rather a sledge hammer blow, which brought bad temper and made him desperately angry.

He seized his hat, and without further conversation with any one, left the house and strode sullenly down the street. At the first corner he turned up a by path, and then ran across lots to the main street, and entered a drinking saloon.

"Why did you play, then?" the bartender was asking savagely, addressing a rough looking boy, Tim Short by name. "You have owed me for two months, and now here is another game of billiards to charge."

"I thought I should beat," said Tim, with a discouraged and demoralized look.

"That's what you've thought every time, but that don't pay me. I'm going to have my money now. If you don't pay, I will get it from your father; so come, square up, and be quick about it."

"I will settle on pay day."

"No, that won't do; you have promised that before. Either give me something for security or I will see your father tomorrow."

"How much is the whole bill?" asked Matthew.

"One dollar," replied the bartender.

"Here, Tim, is the dollar. I will lend it to you. Pay him and come with me."

Young Short clutched the dollar eagerly, and turned it over to his creditor with evident reluctance.

"Come, Tim," went on Matthew, "let us go home; it is late for us to be out."

The latter looked upon Matthew as his benefactor, and followed him promptly into the street. When the two were quite alone by themselves, De Vere took his companion by the arm and said:

"I'm in luck finding you, Tim. I rushed down to the saloon, but I was afraid you had gone home, it is so late."

"And I'm better off than you to have my bill paid. How is it you are in luck, and paying out money so free?"

"Never mind the money, Tim," De Vere replied nervously. "I want you to do me a favor. Will you?"

"Will I? Well, I should think I would."

"Will you promise never to mention what I say to any one?"

"I promise."

"It would get us both into trouble if you should, Tim."

"But it ain't nothin' so awful bad, is it, Matthew?" asked Tim, with a tremor of alarm in his voice.

"I think I can trust you, Tim," replied De Vere, ignoring his companion's question.

"I know you can, after all you have done for me," replied Tim gratefully.

De Vere drew young Short close to him as they turned into a dark, narrow street.

"Tim," said he, in suppressed agitation, "you know those tall oak trees on the old Booker road?"

"What, them by the cave in the big rock, do you mean?"

"Yes, that's the place."

Young Short commenced to breathe fast with excitement.

"You know, Tim," said De Vere, scarcely above a whisper, "you know the bushes and rock together furnish a good hiding place."

"I should think they would," responded Tim dubiously.

"We've got some work to do there."

"What, not tonight?"

"Yes, as soon as we can get there, or it will be too late."

"Don't you think it's too late now, Matthew?" suggested Tim.

"I tell you to come along," commanded De Vere in anything but a pleasant mood.

"You didn't tell me what you are going there for."

"I have good reasons for going there. I want to get square with a fellow," responded Matthew, with a ring of revenge in his voice.

"But couldn't you do it just as well alone?"

"No, I couldn't."

"Afraid?" queried Tim.

This question did not have a good effect upon Matthew's nerves, but he was too prudent to fly into a passion with Tim at this time.

"Who is this fellow?" asked young Short doggedly, after a little silence.

"Fred Worthington," answered De Vere bitterly. "I'll show him that he can't interfere with me."

"Fred Worthington!" echoed Tim; and he stopped short where he was.

"I think we had better get some good clubs," said De Vere.

"And then we will get the worst of it," replied Tim. "I know Fred Worthington too well to take any chances on him."

"But we will jump out upon him when he is not expecting us," urged Matthew.

It was hard work to screw Tim's courage up to the necessary point, but his sense of obligation to Matthew finally overcame his well founded fears of Fred Worthington's strong arms, and he promised to take part in the disappointed rival's dastardly plot.

The point to which De Vere led his rascally associate was close beside the path along which Fred Worthington would have to pass on his way home from Dr. Dutton's. Although not far beyond the limits of the village, it was a lonely spot, with no houses near by, and the two young highwaymen could not have found a more suitable place to put their cruel design into execution.

Crouching behind the bushes, the cowardly pair lay in wait, each grasping a heavy stick in his hand, ready to dart out and rain revengeful blows upon their innocent victim.

IV.

THE evening was a memorable one for Fred. His enjoyment had been far greater than he anticipated; and what a boy of sixteen will not anticipate is not worth considering.

It seemed to him, as he left Grace Bernard's with a proud step and lightsome heart, that he had been blue over the society question for nothing, for, in fact, had he at this time possessed no friend save the single one whose arm now rested upon his own, he would have been fully satisfied. Perchance, in his boyish imaginings, he was more happy than he could ever be in after years, even though his brightest dreams should become a living reality.

And it is but just to Fred to say that his fair companion, as they walked leisurely toward her home, was almost if not quite as happy as himself.

This was the first time they had ever been out together in the evening, and as he somewhat timidly pressed her arm closely to his side, he felt all the pride of a hero in performing such delightful, if not dangerous, escort duty. But indeed

there was danger enough awaiting him, though it lay in ambush, and he had not considered the possibility of its existence.

The distance to Nellie's home was not great, but it may reasonably be suspected that the time occupied in traversing it was somewhat prolonged. Under similar circumstances, with such delightful company, the reader himself would perhaps have used every honorable device to consume as many minutes as possible before parting with his fair associate. I shall not criticise such a course, but will be just frank enough to say that this is exactly what Fred did do.

Of course, by way of conversation, it was natural to discuss the evening party and those present. Young De Vere very justly came in for a degree of censure.

"What could have been the trouble with Matthew?" asked Nellie, clinging closely to Fred as they passed a lonesome lane.

"I'd rather not discuss him," replied the latter.

"Why not? Is he such a friend of yours that you will say nothing against him? Surely you can give no excuse for his acting as he did to-night."

"Well, you are partially right."

"In what way?"

"So far as this—that I dislike to speak against any one."

"I thought it could not be you were so friendly that you wished to shield him."

"No, for he is very unfriendly towards me. Didn't you notice that when he asked you to waltz with him?"

"Yes, but you did not hear his remark about you, I hope."

"Oh, yes, I heard it—he probably wanted me to hear it—but I could not notice it there."

"It was hateful and mean in him," replied Nellie sympathetically; "and he was as rude as he could be all the evening."

Fred had too much spirit to take kindly to being insulted, but Nellie's warm hearted manner of sympathizing with him, and her criticism of his rival, made him almost wish De Vere were again present to make some insolent remark, that he might have the pleasure of hearing Nellie still further champion his cause.

"But you did not tell me what made him so uncivil," continued Nellie.

"No."

"Do you know?"

"I suppose he was vexed."

"I should think he must have been very much piqued to act as he did."

"Yes, it would seem so."

"But what could have caused it, I wonder?" asked Nellie, with much innocence.

"Do you really want me to tell you?"

"Why, to be sure I do."

"Couldn't you guess?"

"I know I could not."

"Not if you were to try very hard?"

"No."

"You should be more egotistical, then."

"Why, what do you mean, Fred?"

"I mean that what made him unhappy was just the thing that made me happy, and gave me the pleasantest evening of my life," replied Fred, tightening the pressure slightly on his companion's arm.

"I cannot see how this affects me, or proves, as you say, that I should be more egotistical," replied Miss Nellie, continuing, with feminine perversity, to feign innocence and ignorance, that she might keep Fred longer on a topic at once so flattering and delightful.

"Then I will be plainer—very plain—and say that you were the cause yourself."

If the night had been a light one, Fred would have seen a bewildering blush cover the face of his companion. As it was, he guessed the truth, and realized that the effect of his words was altogether gratifying to Nellie's pride—it could hardly be anything more sentimental than pride.

But now they were at her home—all too soon as it seemed to Fred—and her father and mother

had heard them come up the steps; so the "good night" must be brief.

Nellie extended her hand, with its graceful, tapering fingers, to him, and thanked him very prettily for his attention during the evening, and for escorting her safely home. In return, Fred gave her hand a slight pressure from the impulse of his honest, manly heart, that meant a thousand thanks for the pleasure she had given him, which would be a gratifying recollection for weeks and months to come.

V.

WHILE Fred was enjoying the latter part of his evening so thoroughly, Matthew was miserable in his anger, as he and his confederate remained crouched under the shadow of the bushes, chafing at our hero's failure to appear.

Every minute seemed ten to him, there in the cold night wind, as he meditated upon the events of the past few hours, and imagined his rival enjoying the pleasure of escorting Nellie home. The more he thought upon the matter the more vividly he pictured the situation, and the greater the contrast seemed to be between his own position and that of the boy he hated.

And as he dwelt upon this picture, and thought, and thought rightly, that Fred was prolonging the time in reaching Dr. Dutton's house, his anger became more bitter against his intended victim, for being kept there so long in the frosty night.

It was indeed a galling situation for Matthew, and right well he deserved to be placed in it. He was on a wicked errand—an errand for which he should have suffered a severe punishment. Still

the time went on, and the cold grew more intense, until their teeth chattered, and their fingers were benumbed; yet Fred did not appear.

Matthew was so bent on revenge that he hated to give up his evil project; but he had waited so long, looked, listened, and hoped, and no sound of footsteps could he hear, that now he broke out angrily:

"Worthington isn't coming, after all—the sneak!"

"Don't believe he is," shivered Tim, who was evidently very anxious to get out of his contract.

"But he must come this way," continued Matthew.

"He might go to the other road and cut across the grove."

"Why should he do that when it is so much farther? Listen, do you hear it? There is a step now!" exclaimed De Vere, clutching his club tightly.

"Sure as I'm alive, there he comes," said Tim, pointing to an approaching object just growing visible.

"Let him get nearly opposite us before striking. Ah, now I'll get square with him—the tramp! I'll teach him better than to interfere with me," continued Matthew, swinging his club as if raining imaginary blows upon the head of his victim.

"I should think so," observed Tim.

"He will think so, too, in about a minute. He will wish he had not crossed my path."

"Where shall I hit him?"

"Hit him on the leg so he can't run."

"He might get my club if he has the use of his arms, and then it would be all day with us," put in Tim, with a hint at caution.

"Don't you worry. I'll fix him quick enough so he won't bother us with his arms," replied De Vere, in a savage tone.

"How will you do it?"

"Hush, now is the time!" returned Matthew, darting from his hiding place.

"Stop, you villain!"

The words suddenly rang out upon the night in a powerful voice. They struck terror to the heart of the highwayman, whose club was raised high in the air, ready to descend upon his victim.

The sudden appearance of a strong man before him, as if by magic, the disappointment, the danger and the surprise, almost paralyzed Matthew with fear, and he dropped his club and fled, like the coward that he was.

But not so fortunate in escaping was young Tim Short, for before he had time to realize the unexpected situation his club fell heavily upon the leg of the man that he had taken for Fred Worthington.

Though he heard the command to stop, and did actually break the force of his blow in consequence, nevertheless he struck so hard that Jacob Simmons, for that was the name of the new comer, thought for a time that his leg was broken. Notwithstanding this, he made sure of his assailant, and held him in an iron grasp.

Jacob was fairly taken aback at first as the two boys rushed out upon him, but Tim's well aimed club speedily brought him to his senses, and aroused his temper as well. He consequently fell upon his assailant like a madman, and choked him till he cried piteously for quarter.

"What does this mean?" demanded Jacob angrily, at the same time enforcing his demand by shaking his prisoner as a terrier might shake a rat.

"I do—don—don't know," replied the boy, as he, with much difficulty, forced breath enough through the grasp of the strong man's hand around his throat to speak at all.

"Don't, eh?" echoed Mr. Simmons, with another shake, given, probably, with the view of bringing Tim back to his senses.

"It was a mistake—oh, don't; you will cho—choke me to death."

"Well, then, tell me all about this business, and why you assaulted me in this outrageous manner."

"We didn't know it was you. We thought——"

"The truth, mind you, now."

"I am telling the truth, and I say we thought you were some one else."

"It was a plot, then, to rob and murder some one else?"

"No, it wasn't, and I didn't have anything to do with the plot. Matthew hired me to——"

"Matthew who?" interrupted Jacob, whose anger was giving place, to some extent, to his interest in the affair.

"Matthew De Vere."

"Matthew De Vere!" exclaimed Mr. Simmons, with intense surprise, giving vent to a low whistle. "His father rich, proud, a banker," continued the wily Jacob, easing his grasp upon the throat of Tim. "And he, Matthew De Vere, is the villain who raised his club to hit me on the head—to murder me, perhaps?"

Young Short caught at the idea of freeing himself by implicating Matthew, so he replied:

"Yes, he was the fellow, but when he saw his mistake he dusted out, for it wasn't you he wanted."

"Of course you would plead innocent—all outlaws do—and try to throw the blame on some one else; but you can't get away now. I shall have you arrested and locked up for an attempt at robbery and murder."

"Oh, don't—don't!" pleaded Tim, with tears and bitter anguish.

"Come along. I'll have to put you in safe keeping, where you will not get a chance to try this game of murder again right away."

"Please don't! Oh, don't, Mr. Simmons! I will tell you all I know about it, and do anything—work all my life for you if you will only let me go."

"Let you go, after this affair? Yes, I will let you go—go to the sheriff! Come along, I say."

"It's all Matthew's fault—wanting to lick Fred Worthington."

"Do you expect me to believe such a story? It's a fine yarn to try and clear yourself when you are the one that almost broke my leg with your club."

"He told me to hit you——"

"Told you to hit me?"

"I mean to hit Fred, for he was waiting for him—said he wanted to get square with him."

"Then, according to your own story, you hired yourself to Matthew De Vere to come here and waylay an innocent boy, and beat him with clubs, and perhaps murder him."

"Yes; but I didn't think of it in that way or I wouldn't have come. Matthew hired me."

"So much the worse, if you would sell your-

self to do such a wicked deed. You are as guilty as he, and it is my duty to hand you over to the State."

It was plainly Mr. Simmons' duty to hand young Short over to the authorities, but when he found that Matthew De Vere was the principal offender, a scheme instantly suggested itself to him—a plan to extort money from the rich banker to keep the affair a secret, and save his family from disgrace. Thus Jacob's regard for the law and justice, which was sincere at first, before he saw an opportunity of turning his knowledge to a money value, was now but an assumed position to draw Tim out, and to hold over his head the power that would frighten him into doing his bidding.

By entertaining this idea of suppressing the knowledge of the crime in order to get the reward Mr. Simmons became, in a sense, a party to the assault upon himself, and morally guilty with the boys, though undoubtedly in a less degree.

However, this did not trouble his conscience, as he was one who lived for money, and he saw here a chance to replenish his pocketbook. He took Tim with him, and, after getting his story in full regarding Matthew's object in waylaying Fred Worthington, gave him a conditional pardon; that is, he agreed to wait a few days before

handing him over to the sheriff, to see if he could get Matthew to buy his liberty by paying handsomely to suppress the whole affair. If he did not succeed in this, he assured Tim that he would then be arrested, convicted, and sent to prison.

Mr. Simmons next told his prisoner that Matthew was liable with him, and would be arrested at the same time unless he complied with his proposition, which was that he should be paid five hundred dollars cash for the injuries he had received. If Matthew and his father did not comply with this demand, then he would summon the sheriff at once, have both offenders arrested, and the entire facts made public.

Though five hundred dollars seemed an enormous sum to young Short, he was nevertheless glad to get off temporarily on these conditions. He promised to try to raise this amount through Matthew, or, if he failed in so doing, to secure by some means one hundred dollars to free himself. Jacob had at last very shrewdly, though with seeming reluctance, agreed, if Tim could do no better, to take the one hundred dollars in settlement for the part he played in the assault, provided he would hold himself in readiness to testify against Matthew.

Short readily agreed to this proposition, and looked upon the magnanimous Mr. Simmons as a

paragon of liberality, and as his best friend. But before leaving the presence of his benefactor, the latter was careful to note down all the facts touching upon the assault as related by Tim, and made the boy sign the statement.

This was a little precaution probably intended to assist Tim's memory if he should happen to forget some important points.

Jacob never forgot little matters like these when the interest of his friends was to be considered, and in this especial instance he was unusually keen.

VI.

MATTHEW left the scene of the assault very hastily, without even the ordinary civility of saying good night. This, however, was in keeping with his manner of leaving the party, for there he did not so much as thank Miss Grace for her entertainment.

Twice that night he had found walking too slow for his purpose, though his object in the two cases was quite unlike. In the one instance he was on a mission of revenge, and in the other he was animated by a keen desire to avoid the immediate neighborhood of Mr. Jacob Simmons.

He evidently imagined that Jacob's society would not be agreeable to him. Taking this view of the matter, he thought it would be the wise thing for him to come away, and not to press himself upon the man at so late an hour of the night.

He reasoned that there would be no impropriety in such a course, as Mr. Simmons couldn't be lonesome, for Tim was with him, and would probably remain with him for the night at least, so he withdrew from the scene.

We commend Matthew's worldly wisdom, as things turned out, in doing just as he did, for had he remained it is altogether probable that Jacob would have given him also an exhibition of his muscular powers, and Matthew — the gentle youth of fine clothes and haughty manner— wouldn't have taken to it kindly. It wouldn't have been a popular entertainment for him in any sense.

He seemed fully impressed with this idea of the situation, for never had he got over the ground so fast as he did that night. He ran the entire distance to his own home, and even when in his room, with his door locked, he trembled with fear, and cast nervous glances around, as if half expecting to see the angry Mr. Simmons rush in and fall upon him with remorseless blows.

Matthew's evening had been anything but a success. Every move he had made had not only failed to accomplish his purpose, but had actually recoiled upon him. He little imagined, though, to what extent this was the case in his last effort, for his fear was only of immediate bodily punishment.

As time passed, and his door was not burst open, he began to feel safe once more, and as terror ceased to occupy his thoughts, it was replaced by jealousy, and a desire for revenge

upon Fred Worthington. He cared little what became of Tim, and gave him hardly a passing thought since he himself was safe from harm. He was not in the mood for sleep, so passed the time in thinking over the events of the evening.

It is a contemptible act of cowardice to lie in wait for a rival, and, taking him thus at a disadvantage, spring upon him and beat him with malicious pleasure. But Matthew would have felt no scruples on this point, for it is just what he had planned to do ; and now that he had made of it a miserable failure, he resolved upon a new plot—an entirely different form of revenge, but one, in many respects, much more to be dreaded.

When Fred Worthington's mind finally descended from the clouds, and he began to think once more in a natural way, he at once took in the situation. He knew that Matthew did not like him, and he had seen him leave the party in an angry mood. Knowing him to be so revengeful, he anticipated that trouble of some sort would follow ; but he little thought what that trouble would prove to be.

Imagine his surprise, therefore, when the next afternoon Matthew called at the store, in a very gracious mood, to see him and to talk over the previous evening's entertainment. He was very agreeable, and as sociable as if they had never quarreled.

After he had gone, Fred began to feel somewhat guilty, thinking he had unjustly wronged him. He disliked to have trouble with any one, and from the fact that they had not been very good friends of late, and that now De Vere had made the first concessions, Fred felt disposed to use every effort to be on good terms with him.

Matthew was quick to take note of this, and it suited his plans exactly. At first he thought he would speak to Tom Martin about his despicable purpose, and get his assistance. But he knew Dave Farrington would not listen to it, for he had already shown a preference for Fred; so he finally concluded to keep his own counsel, for should the facts at any time become known, as they most probably would, then, if another boy shared his secret, they would count heavily against him.

He lost no opportunity in making friends with Fred, and they now appeared together so much that the other boys could not understand what had brought about such a marked change. It was a matter of remark to the girls as well, for they also knew something of Matthew's hostility to our young hero.

"I am of the opinion that this sudden friendship is for a purpose that Fred little suspects," said Dave Farrington, "for you know the circumstances and remember what Matthew said to us

before the party. My idea is that he is the worst boy in the village, and that we have never seen how mean he can be. Fred is a good fellow and is working hard to get ahead, and I am sorry to see him fall in with De Vere. If it wasn't meddling with the affairs of other folks, I would tell him to be on his guard."

"It does seem queer," replied Tom, "that matters should have taken this turn; but I guess nothing will come of it. I know Matthew always wants his own way, though, and is bound to have it, and that is why his actions seem so odd just now."

It had been Fred's custom to stay in the store nights until he got ready to go home, but since he had been under the influence of Matthew he had changed in this respect. Though he firmly intended to do nothing that he would be ashamed of, or that would injure him in any way, yet he was in dangerous company, and, like all others under similar circumstances, was gradually being affected by it.

One night De Vere suggested, as they were passing a drinking saloon—the very one where he had found Tim Short—that they should go in and have a glass of ginger ale. Fred had some conscientious scruples about this, but, lest he should offend his companion, he yielded, saying to himself: "There is nothing intoxicating about

it ; I don't see any more harm in it than drinking soda. Still I don't like the surroundings."

Having once visited that place of ruin, he hesitated less about going the second time ; so when he and Matthew again passed it (and the latter purposely led him that way), Fred, feeling that he was under obligations to his companion for his previous treat, invited him in. This time they lingered a while to watch the billiard playing, and when a table was unoccupied Matthew asked Fred to have a game with him, adding that he would pay the expense.

Fred accepted the proposition and won the game, though he had never played before, while Matthew had had a good deal of experience.

Billiards is a fascinating game, and, from the very fact of its fascination, it is extremely dangerous for boys. It is usually associated with drinking saloons, where the air is filled with evil influences and the fumes of rum and tobacco ; and, aside from these degrading surroundings, it is a very expensive game. It is a very common occurrence for one to find himself two or three dollars short for a single evening's entertainment of this sort, and this, too, when no drinking or betting has been done.

Fred, of course, felt elated that he should win the game with an old player, while Matthew chuckled over his own success ; for, in purposely

allowing his opponent to win, and thereby playing on his conceit, he had scored more points in his own subtle game than he had hoped.

The obstacle that at first appeared to stand in the way of this young scoundrel's accomplishing his purpose seemed to be well nigh surmounted. He had carefully managed his victim, and would soon be paid for all his trouble by the terrible revenge he would enjoy.

There now remained the final act, which he arranged with the bartender, by paying him a certain sum.

It was agreed that De Vere should bring Fred in for a drink, and that they would persuade him to take a glass of lager beer, that should contain a large adulteration of whisky.

Tim Short was taken into the secret with a view to rendering any service that might be required of him.

When the boys next appeared at the saloon, Matthew, with a pompous air, said:

"John, give me a glass of lager; I have got sick of drinking ginger ale. It's nothing but a baby drink, any way. Fred, you'd better try the lager, too. It's ever so much nicer than that slop. Just try it now, and if you don't like it you needn't drink it. See how clear it is! I guess I can beat you at billiards after taking this."

The bartender laughed, and after indorsing all that De Vere had said, added :

" Folks is got about over drinking ginger ale, nowadays. Lager's the proper stuff ! "

Fred was a good scholar, but there was a little word of two letters that he had not yet learned how to spell ; that is—*no*.

He drank the beer, and his fate was sealed. He was now a tool in Matthew's hands. On some pretense the young hypocrite excused himself from playing a game of billiards as he had at first proposed, and induced Fred to follow him into the street, knowing it was not safe for him to remain longer in the heated saloon.

It was his first intention to go back to the store, thinking that if Mr. Rexford should see Fred in a tipsy state he would discharge him. But just before reaching the merchant's place of business he stopped, and, taking Fred by the arm, walked quickly up the street.

Tim followed close enough to answer promptly if Matthew should summon him.

The liquor had already begun to have the desired effect. Fred had become talkative and boisterous, and in such a condition that he could be influenced to do almost any absurd thing.

Matthew was bound to make the most of his opportunities, and so he incited him by flattering words to call at Dr. Dutton's house, opposite

which they now stood. Fred assented to this, provided Matthew would accompany him. This De Vere readily agreed to do, and he led the intoxicated youth up to the door, and rang the bell sharply.

Presently the door opened, and on stepping in Fred looked about for his companion, but he was nowhere to be seen.

VII.

TIM SHORT made a very wretched attempt to obtain a night's sleep after escaping from captivity, both because the night was well spent before he reached home and because matters of too great importance rested upon his mind to allow him to bury them in slumber.

He reported at the factory at the usual morning hour, but after working a little time complained of being sick, and was released for the remainder of the day. If he was not physically ill, he was doubtless sick at heart, so he speedily sought Matthew, and told him, with more or less ill feeling, of his experience at the hands of Jacob Simmons, and of the latter's demands in settlement (as he called it) for his injuries.

"And you 'squealed' on me?" demanded De Vere, with ill suppressed anger.

"I told him who you were, to save him from choking me to death."

"Is that all you said?"

"He told me to tell the truth or——"

"So you gave him the whole story —you idiot, to tell everything you know!"

"I only wish you had been in my place."

"If I had I wouldn't have been an idiot!" retorted De Vere.

"Oh, you wouldn't have! Some folks are very smart," replied Tim, getting angry.

"I'd have been smart enough for that."

"A lot you would. If he'd had you as he had me, you would have told more than I did, and promised anything he asked."

"I'm not a baby, I want you to understand, to cry if any one looks at me."

"No, you are very brave, to have to get some one to help you to get square with Fred Worthington."

"I was a fool when I got you."

"And I was a fool for having anything to do with you in this business. You will be arrested and sent to prison, and so will I, unless you pay Mr. Simmons the five hundred."

"Arrested! What do you mean?" asked Matthew, turning pale.

"I mean just what I said; if you don't pay him he will come down on us within three days."

"Did he say so?" gasped De Vere.

"Yes, he did. He was going to take me to the sheriff last night, and that's why I told everything."

"Five hundred dollars! I can't get it without asking my father for it."

"Well, ask him then."

"He would find out everything, and would whip me almost to death."

"Better be whipped than go to prison, and have every one know all about it."

"I won't do either."

"How can you avoid it?"

"Five hundred dollars is too much."

"You'd better see Mr. Simmons and fix it with him."

"I don't want to see him."

"You will have to see him or send the money."

The two boys finally called upon Jacob Simmons and entered into negotiations.

"I ought to have more than five hundred," said the latter.

"How can I give it to you if I haven't got it?" asked Matthew.

"Your father is rich, and could give me ten times as much and not miss it."

"Oh, don't tell him. I will pay you what I can."

"If you had the money I would take it and say nothing more to him or any one; but I must have it or hand you over to the sheriff."

Matthew shuddered at this thought. He was in a dilemma, and hardly knew which way to turn.

After a good deal of parley, Mr. Simmons agreed to take three hundred dollars in place of the five originally demanded. This act, however, was not inspired by liberality or a desire to make the penalty less for the boys, but with a feeling that he might get nothing if he were to take the matter to the elder De Vere, as he gathered from Matthew's conversation that the latter would run away from home rather than submit to the severe punishment his father would be sure to give him.

"Three hundred dollars," Jacob argued, "is much better than nothing."

Matthew gave him what cash he had with him —seventeen dollars—and his watch, and signed an agreement to pay the balance within six weeks. He also indorsed the statement that Tim had signed about the assault as being true, and the careful Mr. Simmons replaced it in his large pocketbook for future use if it should at any time be needed.

VIII.

WHEN Fred found that he was in Dr. Dutton's house, and that Matthew had disappeared and deserted him, he was at a loss to know what to say or what move to make. His mind was far from clear, and his tongue so unwieldy that he could hardly manage it.

He stood silent for a moment, evidently trying to collect his thoughts and make out his situation; then, muttering some half intelligible words, he made a start as if to leave the house.

The doctor, who answered the summons of the bell, was struck nearly dumb by the sight that greeted his eyes. He closed the door, and, taking the youth by the shoulder, supported his unsteady steps to the office.

The fumes of whisky readily indicated the cause of this unfortunate occurrence, but the doctor was at a loss to know why Fred should be in such a state. Was he not one of the most exemplary boys in town, and did he not belong to the school, of which Dr. Dutton himself was superintendent?

Surely something must be wrong, thought the

doctor, and he began to question the boy, who on going from the cool air to a warm room had grown so suddenly sick that he looked as if he would faint.

The kind physician laid him gently on a lounge, and gave him such professional treatment as the case demanded.

There is a vast difference between one who has become intoxicated by a single glass and one who has been drinking for hours, and has thereby paralyzed his nerves and deadened his brain. In the former case the liquor can be thrown from the stomach, and the victim soon recovers the powers of his mind; while in the other event it may take several days to restore his customary vigor.

This sickness of Fred's was the very best thing that could have happened to him, for he got rid of the vile poison before it had time to stupefy him to any great extent. Nevertheless the dose was so strong and the shock so great for his stomach that for a time he was extremely sick and weak.

But after lying quietly on the lounge for an hour or so, he regained a little strength.

The doctor ordered his carriage, helped Fred into it and took him home. The latter was still so unnerved that he could hardly walk, but the cool air benefited him so much that when he

reached home he managed to get into the house alone, and up to his room without disturbing his parents, who had retired some time before.

The next morning he awoke with a severe headache, and seemed generally out of tune.

The mere thought of what he had done—how he had disgraced himself by going to a public bar, and there drinking to intoxication—caused him the deepest sorrow and regret; but when he fully realized what a severe wound his conduct would inflict upon his mother and father, and how they would grieve over it—when he thought what the people of the town would say, and remembered that he had actually called in this lamentable state at Dr. Dutton's house—the place of all others he would have wished to avoid—he became sick at heart as well as in body, and his tumultuous feelings were only soothed by tears of honest repentance.

However, Fred hurriedly dressed himself, went to the store as usual, and commenced his accustomed labors. He saw at once, by Mr. Rexford's manner, that he did not know what had happened the previous night, and this afforded him a slight temporary relief; still, he knew it was only a question of time before his employer would learn the whole story.

When this took place, what would be the result? Would he lose his situation? He knew

that Mr. Rexford was a stern man, having little charity for the faults of others. That his clerk should have been intoxicated the previous night would undoubtedly irritate him greatly.

Fred imagined that every one whom he saw knew of what he had done, and looked upon him with disgust. He felt tempted to leave the village, and never be seen again where he had so disgraced himself. Could he only go to some new place, among strangers, and commence life over again, he might have a better chance to work his way upward; but here this shame would always hang, like a dark cloud, above him.

On reflection, however, he saw that it would be both unmanly and ungrateful to leave his parents.

No; he was the guilty party, and he must stay here, where the unfortunate occurrence had taken place, and here try, by the strictest discipline, and the most watchful care, to regain his former standing among his friends.

As Fred thought over the occurrences of the past few weeks—of Matthew's decided hostility, of his course at the party, and his sudden friendship since that time—of his treachery and meanness the night before, in getting him to call at Dr. Dutton's while intoxicated, and his deception in so suddenly leaving him at the door—he

saw clearly that he had been made the victim of De Vere's mean and cruel malice.

Moreover, he did not believe that a single glass of beer would have produced such an effect upon him, and so he strongly suspected the truth—that he had been drugged.

Still, he decided to bear the blame himself, and not throw it upon another, though there might be justice in such a course. He felt confident that the truth would at some time come to light, if he said nothing about it, whereas, should he bring forward his suspicion as an excuse for getting tipsy, the charge would at once be denied, and then he would be less liable to fix the guilt upon the young villain who had made him the plaything of his ill will.

He knew, also, that he was to blame for having visited the iniquitous den at all, and much more for allowing himself to be persuaded to indulge even in what is popularly considered a harmless drink.

He was so absent minded during the day, and showed so clearly in his face that something was troubling him, that keen eyed John Rexford observed it, and wondered what had happened to check the flow of the boy's spirits.

Rexford was a selfish man, and thought that possibly something pertaining to the store had gone wrong. Such an idea was enough to

arouse his suspicion, for he was wholly wrapped up in his business. He could not look beyond that, and had no feeling for others—only making an occasional show of it for the sake of policy.

A man who lives in such a way is not half living. He is not broad, intelligent, liberal, and sympathetic, but is narrowed down to a sordid, grasping existence.

I often pity such men, for though they may have wealth in abundance, they know not how to enjoy it. Neither do they possess the faculty of deriving pleasure from kindness and generosity.

They can see no beauty in art or nature, and when they become unfit for pursuing their vocation, they have nothing to look forward to. The life beyond is something to which they have given little thought. They have starved their nobler nature that is nourished on higher things, until it is dwarfed and shriveled, and the baleful results of such an unnatural mode of life are pictured in their countenances.

Fred's most trying ordeal during the day was that of going to Dr. Dutton's house with goods; for if others did not know of what was on his mind, surely the doctor's family did. He knew that he had forfeited the good opinion they had had of him, and he wished to avoid meeting them.

To his surprise Mrs. Dutton greeted him pleasantly, and made no reference whatever to the affair of the previous night. Her motherly nature pitied him sincerely, for she saw plainly written in his face the sorrow that he so keenly felt. Bless the dear soul for her kind, sympathetic heart, and the cheerful, helpful look she gave the boy in the hour of his trial!

This unexpected charity helped Fred not a little; but the conspicuous absence of Miss Nellie, evidently due to a purpose of avoiding him, sent a chill deep into his very heart, which was plainly reflected in his face and exhibited in his demeanor. Fred's regard for her, I think we may safely infer, was much stronger and of a finer type than the ordinary preferences shown by boys of his age; therefore we can understand why he was so deeply affected by her turning away from him as if he were unfit to be her associate.

Matthew De Vere made the most of his opportunity. He felt that he was being revenged now. He took great care to spread the report, and to inform a certain one in particular of the facts concerning Fred. His version of them was a highly colored one; but of course he made no allusion to the adulteration of the liquor. He claimed that he induced Fred to leave the bar room, and intimated that he must have drunk

several times before he saw him, "for," he said, "one glass of beer could not have made him tipsy."

By afternoon, the report spread nearly through the town, for, as Milton says:

Evil news rides post, while good news baits.

Dave Farrington and Tom Martin called to see Fred and talk the matter over with him. The latter did not breathe his suspicions of the real cause of the occurrence, but simply told the facts. The boys quickly replied that they considered it a trick of De Vere's, and that this was the mean way he had taken to carry out his threat of "getting the advantage of him."

This conversation confirmed Fred's opinion, and though he felt ashamed of himself, and was bound to suffer for his foolish act, while the guilty party went free, yet he reflected:

"I would rather be in my place than in Matthew's, for I shall learn by this experience not to be influenced by another to do anything without first counting the cost, and seeing whether it is right and best. If it is not, I won't do it for anybody's friendship. This will also teach me to keep away from suspicious places, and to avoid the temptations and corrupting influences of a bar room. De Vere's guilt will work more injury to him, in the long run, than my damaged reputation will to me."

Towards the close of the day Mr. Rexford heard of the previous night's occurrence. He immediately called Fred into the counting room, and sternly, and in an excited manner, questioned him as to the truth of the report.

The latter acknowledged its correctness, and told his story, stating that he drank but one glass of beer, and that that was his first, and would also be his last.

The suspicious merchant was very angry, and disposed to doubt the boy's statement. He said that it was a mystery to him where Fred got the money to spend for such a purpose—intimating that perhaps it came from his own cash drawer. Then, after giving him a sharp lecture, he hinted at discharge, saying that he would have no drinking persons about him.

John Rexford well knew the value of such a boy as Fred, and had no real intention of sending him adrift. But he wished to make the most of his opportunity, and to impress the boy, and the public if possible, with the idea that in keeping him he was doing a very magnanimous act.

So he said that he would overlook this fault, though a grave one, and retain Fred for the present on probation; but he warned the boy that he must keep a sharp lookout, as the first misdeed, or suspicious act on his part, would result in immediate discharge.

The turn of affairs was anything but pleasant to Fred, though better than he had expected. And it was far more satisfactory to him than the previous suspense, when he had not known what his employer would decide to do.

When the day's work was over, Fred went directly home, where he found his father and mother seated before the open fire.

The latter was somewhat worried about her son, for he looked pale and worn, and had eaten hardly anything since the night before; still she knew nothing of the cause of this. His father had received some intimation of what had happened, but had decided to say nothing to his wife about it for the present.

Fred had no intention, however, of keeping his parents in ignorance of his adventure; but taking his seat by the side of his mother, and where he could look both parents in the face, he told them the whole story, going minutely into all of the details.

He also told them of the conversation which had occurred between himself and Rexford.

Both parents listened intently to this statement. The mother at first sobbed bitterly, on hearing from the lips of her own child—on whom her hopes and pride were centered—that he had been in such company and in such a condition.

The father doubtless felt the disgrace quite as

keenly, for he was a sensitive, intelligent man, and naturally feared that this was but the beginning of a dissipated life. Still, he could hardly look for that from a boy whom he had tried so hard to instruct in what is manly and right, and who had always seemed to profit by his teaching.

But as Fred progressed in his narration, and showed how the lamentable result had been brought about, and that he had been made a victim of De Vere's revenge in consequence of the latter's jealousy, both parents looked upon the whole matter in a very different light. Mr. Worthington was extremely indignant, and expressed his determination to see De Vere's father and demand redress for the despicable course Matthew had taken. He also vowed that he would wage war against that bartender, and drive him out of town.

Fred, however, urged his father not to do either, since he believed it would only make a bad matter worse ; adding that he had decided that it would be better for him to say and do nothing about the affair, further than to mention that Matthew was with him. He requested his father to adopt the same course. Mrs. Worthington, too, thought this the better plan, so after some persuasion her husband agreed to accept the situation and wait for time to bring the truth to light.

The wisdom of such a course must be apparent to my readers when they stop to think upon the matter, as did Fred. For, had he charged De Vere with being the cause of his misfortune, and alleged that the bartender had drugged him, both villains would instantly have denied it, and would, doubtless, have thrown the lie upon young Worthington, thus making him appear more at disadvantage than before. Besides, the villagers would be disposed to believe them, as it is well known that every one guilty of a misdemeanor is sure to give some excuse for his action, though excuses usually have but little weight.

On the other hand, a secret becomes burdensome to one after a time. If it is of a trivial nature, and the author finds he is not suspected, he will finally tell it as a joke, contrasting his cunning with the stupidity of his victim; while if it be of a graver sort, it will finally be disclosed, if for no other reason than to unburden the mind.

While both of Fred's parents regretted most deeply what had happened, they felt proud to think that he had told the whole truth, without even waiting to be questioned upon the subject.

If all boys would follow Fred's example in this respect whenever they get into any trouble, they would not only retain the confidence of their parents, but would receive the rewards of a clear conscience and an unburdened heart.

IX.

THERE is something rather peculiar about the fact that troubles of any sort never seem to come singly. This has been noticed by almost every person of wide experience, and the idea is crytallized in the proverb: "It never rains but it pours." The adage certainly held true in Fred's case.

Only a few days after the occurrence related in the preceding chapter, and when Fred had begun to feel a little more at ease in his mind, he was called up sharply one night by his employer, who said to him:

"Fred, what have you done with the twenty dollar bill that was in this drawer?"

"I have seen no such bill there to-day, sir," replied the clerk.

"You have seen no such bill, do you say? I took a new twenty dollar bill of James D. Atwood this afternoon, when he settled his account, and I put it in this drawer," pointing to the open cash drawer before him.

"It seems queer, sir; but I am sure that I have not paid it out or seen it. Didn't you give

it to Woodman and Hardy's man when you paid him some money to-day?"

"No!" replied the merchant nervously, "he was here early in the afternoon, before I took the bill. There has been no one to the cash drawer but you and myself—unless you neglected your business and allowed some scoundrel in behind the counter while I was at tea."

Fred flushed up at this intimation that he might have been false to his trust, and replied, with some show of injured feeling:

"Mr. Rexford, if any money has been lost, I am sorry for you; but as I said, I know nothing about it. You say you took in a twenty dollar bill, and that now it is gone. If a mistake has occurred in making change, I don't know why it should be laid to me any more than yourself, for I am as careful as I can be."

"Do you mean to say, young man, that I have made a mistake of this size in making change?"

"I simply say, there must be a mistake somewhere. Have you figured up your cash account to know just how it stands?"

Mr. Rexford had not figured it up, but on discovering that the bill was missing, and noticing that there was little increase in the other money, he jumped to the conclusion that the drawer was twenty dollars short. But on carefully going over his cash and sales accounts, and reckoning

the money on hand, he found that there was just eighteen dollars missing.

This discovery only added mystery to the already perplexing matter. It certainly looked now as though some cunning method had been employed to swindle him.

The merchant's brow contracted at the thought, and after a few moments he said, in an excited and angry manner:

"Worthington, you know about that bill, and are trying to deceive me. I can see no way but that you took it during my absence, and in trying to cover up your act put two dollars in the drawer; but, young man, I'd have you know that such tricks can't be played on me!"

The flush that had appeared upon Fred's face was now gone, and in its stead appeared the paleness of anger. He stepped squarely up to his accuser, and said, in a determined tone:

"Do you mean to say that I stole your money? If you mean that, sir, you say what is false, and you shall——"

"No, no; I don't— r—I won't say that— but—but be calm a e see!"

"Do you with r accusation, then?" demanded t ose manne ch that Rexford r the retract his e ever, for

warned him to adopt a more conciliatory policy and to do it speedily.

He consequently retreated from his position, and assured Fred that he had spoken too hastily in accusing him. He also moved cautiously backward to another part of the store, doubtless feeling that the air would circulate more freely between them if they were some distance apart; then he added:

"But the bill is gone, and as I have not paid it out, I want it accounted for."

"No doubt you do," said Fred. "I should like to know where it is myself. As long as you put it on that ground I will not object, but you shall not charge me squarely with committing a theft."

"No, I won't charge you directly with taking it, but I have my opinion as to where it has gone," rejoined Rexford, with an insinuating air.

Fred knew well what that opinion was; but it was beyond his power to challenge it while unexpressed, and he could not at that time change it by proving his innocence, so he r[illegible]:

"Very well, you can think as [illegible] if that gives you any satisfaction."

[illegible] good! [illegible]et my [illegible] think[illegible] acting! [illegible]ny [illegible]as your

duty to work for my interest, and look out for this store in my absence. As this bill disappeared while under your charge, I shall hold you responsible for it," said the merchant, as he rubbed his thin, bony hands together.

This made the color again change in Fred's face, which, being noticed by Rexford, influenced him to move a few paces nearer to the door, as he possibly thought it still a little warm for his comfort, while young Worthington exclaimed:

"You will never get a cent of my money for this purpose! Now you just remember that!"

"Not so fast, young man! You forget that I owe you about fifteen dollars, and I'll keep that amount in partial payment for this loss. Don't think you are going to get ahead of me quite so easy!"

"I'm not trying to get ahead of you, but I want my rights and what is due me, and I will have both. I don't more than half believe there was a twenty dollar bill here at all! It is one of your mean tricks to beat me out of my money. It is not much more, sir, than I have seen you do by customers—adulterating goods, giving short weight and measures, and——"

"Stop there! you vil—er—insinuating rascal," yelled the proprietor, in a rage, his limbs and features twitching nervously. "Do you mean to say that I cheat my customers, and——"

"Yes, that is just what I mean," replied Fred firmly.

"Ill have you arrested at once. I won't be insulted by such a scamp!"

"Be careful whom you call a scamp!" said Fred, while Rexford again edged off. "I'd like to have you arrest me, for then I could tell things about you and your store that would make a stir in this village! What if some of the folks find out that the XXX St. Louis brand of flour, for which they pay you ten dollars a barrel, is a cheap grade that you bought in plain barrels and stamped yourself? Now do you want to arrest me? If you do there are many other things I can tell, and I wouldn't pass your accounts by either. I know something of what has been going on here—more than you think, perhaps."

These rapid and earnest utterances from young Worthington wrought a complete change in the merchant. They alarmed him, for he saw that the boy had the advantage, and out of policy he must stop matters before they became any worse. So he said, in a humble and subdued tone:

"Fred, it's no use for us to quarrel about this. You know it is not proper for you to go outside and tell your employer's business, and——"

"I know it is not, and I would only do so to defend myself; but when you threaten to keep

my money, and to have me arrested, then I will show what kind of a man is trying to take advantage of me."

"Very well, then, if I pay you your money, you will say nothing about the business of this store, I suppose?"

"No, I will say nothing about what I have just mentioned, unless I should be put on trial; then, of course, I should be obliged to testify."

"You will not be put on trial. I take you at your word—your word of honor," added the merchant impressively.

"Yes, my word of honor!" repeated Fred, "and that means that your secrets are safe."

The wily Rexford had now gained his point—Fred's promise—and he quickly changed front and cried:

"Well, there's your money—fifteen dollars—now consider yourself discharged from my employ!"

"'Discharged,' did you say, sir?" ejaculated Fred, utterly taken aback at this sudden turn of events.

"I said 'discharged,'" repeated the merchant, fidgeting about; "you know what the word means, I presume?"

Fred did know what it meant. It meant more than Rexford's narrow spirit could even comprehend. It meant disgrace, perhaps ruin.

Fred took the money, the few bills, the last he would earn in the old store, and stood for a moment turning them over listlessly—evidently not counting them, but as if to aid him in solving the problem that rested heavily upon his mind.

X.

"ISN'T the money all right?" asked the merchant, finally.

"Mr. Rexford," said Fred, not noticing the inquiry, "I want you to tell me if I lost my place on account of that missing bill."

"That is exactly why," replied the merchant, "for I have always been satisfied with your work. Had you never got into that drunken scrape, though, I probably should not have thought so much of it, even if I could see no way in which to account for the mystery."

Fred felt it a cruel injustice that he should be discharged and disgraced simply on the suspicion of a crime of which he was, in fact, entirely innocent; still he could see that the merchant had some grounds for his distrust, for when a boy once gets a stain upon his character it is almost impossible to utterly efface it. It may be forgotten for a time, but if any untoward circumstance afterward arises, the remembrance of the old misdeed comes speedily to the surface and combines with later developments to work injury to him. Thus my readers can see the great im-

portance of always doing what is right, thereby keeping their reputations unsullied.

Had Fred not fallen a victim to De Vere's revengeful plot, he would have been saved the shame that caused him so much misery; he would have retained the good opinion of the people of Mapleton; he would not have forfeited a certain very desirable friendship; and he would, in all probability, have held his position with Mr. Rexford, regardless of the mysterious disappearance of the bill.

Our young friend left the store where he had worked hard and faithfully, and where he was gaining an insight into a business, the knowledge of which, he hoped, would some day enable him to become an active and prosperous merchant. But now, alas! he had been discharged and sent away in disgrace.

Fred started for home with a more sorrowful heart than he had ever known before. His last chance of success seemed, for a time, to be gone. The villagers would now lose all faith in him, he would have no friends, and even his father and mother might doubt his honesty. It would be useless for him to try for a situation in another store, when it became known why he was discharged from John Rexford's.

It was not surprising that young Worthington was so cast down, while the shock was fresh upon

him, for there seemed now to be no way by which he could build himself up. But in this country there is always a chance for an honest, ambitious, and determined boy to succeed by careful thought, patient endurance, and hard work. Sometimes, to be sure, one can see very little ahead to encourage him to push on and hope to come out victorious. This is the very point at which many fail. They cannot stand up "under fire," but fall back when by sufficient will force they might win a decisive victory in the battle of life.

When Fred reached home, wearing a most dejected look, Mrs. Worthington exclaimed:

"Why, my son, what brings you home so early? I hope you are not ill!"

"No, I'm well enough, mother, but I'm tired of trying to amount to anything."

"What has happened now?" exclaimed the mother, with an alarmed expression on her face.

"I have been discharged by Mr. Rexford, on suspicion of having stolen money from the store."

"Stolen money!" uttered both parents simultaneously, as they grew pale at the terrible thought.

"Yes, that is what I am charged with, though I know nothing about the missing money. That is what makes it so hard to bear."

"Tell me the particulars," said the anxious father; whereupon his son related all that had taken place between himself and the merchant—all save that which related to Rexford's sharp practices, of which he had promised to say nothing.

After the story was finished, all were silent for a time. Both mother and boy looked heart sick, and gazed wistfully into the blaze that burned brightly in the open grate, as if they might discover there the secret of the mystery, while the father sat with knitted brows, studying carefully the statements which Fred had made.

At length he broke the silence, and said:

"My son, you have never deceived me. You came to your mother and me with true manhood, and told us of your first disgrace, while many boys would have tried hard to keep it from their parents. Though I never had reason to suspect you of wrong doing, yet that voluntary act upon your part proved to me that you had the courage to do right and own the truth. Now something has taken place that seems worse than the other; but as you say you are innocent, I believe it, and think that some great mistake has been made. I don't know where it can be, but we must try to clear it up."

Though these were welcome words to Fred, he was much cast down notwithstanding.

"But, father," he replied, "the people will all believe me guilty when they see I am out of the store, and learn the circumstances."

"It is far better for you, my boy, that they should suppose you guilty, when you are conscious of your innocence, than that the whole world should believe you innocent, if you were really guilty."

"Well, I don't see how we can show that I did not take the money."

"Neither do I, at present; but time will straighten this matter, as it does almost everything. Don't expect that we can accomplish much while we are sitting here and talking about it."

"What shall we do, then, father?"

"Wait until we can see how to proceed."

"Well, I don't see any way; and, besides, I am about discouraged, now this is added to the other disgrace; and to think that I am not responsible for either!" exclaimed Fred, with deep emotion.

"I think you were responsible, to a certain extent, for the first," said his father.

"How was I responsible when De Vere led me into it, and had my drink adulterated?"

"You were to be blamed for going to the bar at all. You should not have been influenced by such a fellow as that scamp."

"Yes, I know I didn't do right in that respect, but I had no reason to suppose that such a result would follow."

"One hardly ever does when he is being led on to do some wrong act by a crafty villain."

"Matthew probably would have had his revenge in some other way, if he had not succeeded in his first trial."

"Very true; but had it been in some other form, it might have been shown that he was the guilty party; whereas now it would seem that you were the author of your own misfortune, while the real agent of the occurrence goes unsuspected, and exults in your downfall."

"I thought he wanted to be friends with me, so I tried not to displease him."

"Well, I hope that affair will be a valuable lesson to you. It has certainly proved itself a costly one. You should learn to look at the motives of people, and not trust them too far, simply because they smile upon you once and seem friendly. I don't think that your judgment was very keen, or you would have seen through De Vere's sudden change of manner when you had reason to suppose he would maintain a more hostile attitude than ever."

"Don't be too hard upon him, Samuel," interrupted Mrs. Worthington, who saw that Fred was growing restive under his father's rebukes.

"I am not trying to be hard upon him," replied her husband, "but simply wish to bring this matter before him in a way that will enable him to make the most of this experience. I want to teach him to avoid such errors in the future; for this is an almost fatal mistake in his case, which will follow him for years, and will, so far as I can see, change his whole life's career."

"Why, how is that, father?" inquired Fred, in a half frightened voice.

"It is simply this: your mother and I always intended that you should become a merchant. We instilled that idea into you from a child, and as you grew older, to our satisfaction you showed a decided taste for such a life. At last I got you a place in a store where I thought you could build yourself up, and, in course of time, go into business for yourself. You showed an aptitude for the work, and Mr. Rexford assured me that you were one of the very best clerks that ever worked for him. This, however, was before he was led to suspect you because of the De Vere affair. Now you have been discharged by him on the suspicion of having stolen money from his drawer. Under these circumstances, no one in town would take you into his store as clerk; so you may as well give up, first as last, the idea of becoming a trader."

"Couldn't I get a place in Boston, or somewhere else?"

"I think not; and if you could, I should not be willing to have you go away from home."

"Why not, father? Wouldn't it be better than for me to stay here, where I can get nothing to do?"

"No, my son; you are too young to go away from home, where you would have no one to look after you, and where you would be subject to many evil influences."

"Here every one will think I am a thief, and probably my friends will not speak to me," added Fred, in a more sorrowful tone than ever.

"So much the more reason why you should remain here. Were you to go away now, the people would surely think you guilty. No, no, my son! You must stay here, where circumstances have conspired against you, and show by your life that you are innocent. Then, too, by living here, you can gather evidence that may be of value to you."

"Where can I get any evidence?"

"You can give it, if you can't get it," replied his father, "by going to work tomorrow morning, and thus showing your good intentions."

"There is nothing to do in this dull town that I know of."

"There is always something to be done. But

work won't come to you ; you must look it up. The important thing with you now is to find something to do ; for nothing so injures a boy or man in the sight of others as loafing."

"Can't I be with you in the shop, father?"

"No, I don't want you to learn a shoemaker's trade. If I had been in some other business, I might, perhaps, have been rich now. Shoemaking doesn't afford one much chance to rise, however hard he works. You will have to give up the idea of being a merchant, for the present, at least, and perhaps forever ; so I want you to engage in something where your opportunities for advancement will not be limited as mine have been. No matter if you have to commence at the very bottom of the ladder ; you can build yourself up by hard and intelligent work."

Fred now began to brighten up a little, and after some further conversation with his father and mother, in which they tried to encourage him as much as possible, he said :

"Father, you know I have always had an ambition to be somebody. When I saw that De Vere was trying to turn my friends against me, because I was a poor man's son, I made up my mind that I would push ahead harder than ever; but now"—he spoke with a good deal of determination and force for a boy—"I will succeed if I have to work day and night to accomplish it."

XI.

THE village of Mapleton had but three manufacturing industries: a lumber mill, where logs were sawed up into various dimensions; a box shop, in which were made wooden boxes of many different sizes and shapes; and a large woolen factory. After leaving home, Fred went directly to the agent of the lumber mill and tried to get a chance to work for him, but in this he was unsuccessful. At the box shop he likewise received no encouragement, for there they needed no help. So there was but one more place left to try—that was the woolen factory, where he might still find a vacancy.

The idea of becoming a factory hand, after having been behind the counter as clerk, was repulsive to him; still he must do something; anything was better than idleness. Consequently he went to the mill, and climbed four long flights of stairs, which took him to the top of the building. Here he opened a large, heavy iron door, and entered the spinning room, down which he passed until he came to the overseer's desk.

The latter—a large, gruff, red faced man—was not there at the time, but on spying Fred he hurriedly came forward and demanded to know the boy's business. On being informed that employment was wanted, he said he needed no help, and indicated by his manner that he wished to be bothered no further.

Young Worthington now dropped down a flight and tried to get work in the card room, but with no success. On the next floor below was the weaving room, and here he soon learned that the overseer considered that he could get along very successfully without his help.

But two more departments—the finishing and the dyeing rooms—remained to be visited, and then the ordeal would be over.

As the boy descended the stairs to the former, he had very little hope of accomplishing his purpose, for thus far he had received no encouragement whatever.

Fred knew the gentleman in charge of the department perfectly well, for he was his Sunday school teacher, and moreover, was the father of his friend Dave; nevertheless he passed down the long hall with many a misgiving, and approaching the overseer timidly, said:

"Good morning, Mr. Farrington."

"Good morning, Fred," said the latter cordially. "What brings you here this morning?"

"I came in, sir," replied Fred, with an evident sense of humiliation, "to see if you could give me work in your department."

"Why, you can't mean it! You have not left the store, I hope?"

"Yes, I do mean that I want a job, and I am sorry to say I got through in the store last night."

"You surprise me! What could have been the trouble?"

Fred knew he was now talking to a large hearted, sympathetic man, and one who had always seemed to take a keen interest in his welfare, so he related the entire incident.

Mr. Farrington watched him closely as he recited what had taken place at the store, and then the kind hearted man expressed, both by words and manner, his regret that matters should have taken such a turn. "My boy, don't look so discouraged," he said. "I will do what I can to help you. Mr. Rexford should not have judged you so hastily; from what you tell me, I can't see that he has any good proof that you are guilty."

"I am certain that I am not guilty, but how can I prove my innocence?"

"Ah, that may be difficult, as it is a mysterious affair. But I believe you have told me the truth, and I shall do all I can to help you in every way."

Our young friend brightened up somewhat at this cheering statement, and with a grateful look, replied:

"You know, Mr. Farrington, I just told you why he so readily suspected me, and he has had no faith in me ever since that time."

"That was an unfortunate occurrence, to be sure, but from what Dave says, I think if the whole truth were known you would be blamed less."

"I am glad you know something of the facts of that affair, and have some charity for me; before coming in here, I began to think that every one had turned against me, and I hardly had courage to ask you for a place, they treated me so in all the upper rooms."

"Did you go up there to try to get work?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you come to me first?"

"I hardly know, only I didn't feel like asking you for favors under the circumstances, for I couldn't tell what you would think of me since being discharged by Mr. Rexford."

"Well, that is human nature, I suppose, for I have often noticed that when one gets into trouble, instead of going to his friends for advice and assistance, he will seek the aid of those who care nothing for his welfare. I am glad, however, that you did not get work in the other

rooms, for then you would not have come to me, and I should not have heard your version of this matter. Moreover, I suspect the feeling that kept you away from me this morning would have influenced you to leave my class at the Sunday school. But now you won't do that, will you?"

"No, I will not. Father and mother would not allow me to, any way."

"You are fortunate in having such parents; but as to coming here to work, I want to see you get something better. You are too smart and ambitious a boy to come into a factory, for such labor, as a rule, makes one stupid and unfits him for anything else."

"I would like something better," replied Fred more cheerfully. "I couldn't bear the thought of always being a common mill hand; still I should be very glad to get even this for a while, rather than lie idle. Isn't there a chance to work up, the same way that you did?"

"Yes, there is a chance, but it is a small one; for I should say that from the great number who enter a factory, not one out of ten thousand ever gets as high as an overseer. Still, you are right in wanting to get to work, and you had better be here than on the street corners; but instead of taking up with this, can't it be shown what became of the missing money? If so, perhaps I can influence Mr. Rexford to take you back.

Or, if I couldn't, yet by your showing yourself innocent of his charge you would then be in a fair way of getting a position in some other store, for you were popular with customers, I understand."

"I don't know of any way to account for the missing bill. I never saw it at all."

"You never saw it, and you say there were just eighteen dollars missing?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Farrington mused thoughtfully a moment, then muttered to himself, yet audibly: "Eighteen dollars missing!"

Presently he said aloud: "I will think this matter over, and see what I can do for you. Come and see me tomorrow forenoon."

XII.

JOHN REXFORD cared very little for the interests of others. His humanity was dwarfed and his regard for Fred's feelings or reputation amounted to nothing. In fact, he cherished malice against the boy for getting the better of him in the matter of his dealings with his customers.

That our young friend should have found out so much about his business methods, and should dare to hold the threat of exposure over his head, rankled in the breast of J. Rexford, Esq. With something of a spirit of revenge he took good care to let his suspicions become generally known regarding his former clerk, knowing, as he must, that the injury to him would be almost irreparable.

In consequence of the merchant's free expression of opinion, by noon nearly all of the villagers knew of Fred's discharge and his dishonesty—or rather what they supposed and were willing to accept as his dishonesty.

They further coupled this episode with the bar room occurrence, and at once decided that Worth-

ington was a dissipated young scamp, and whatever good opinions they might have held of him before were straightway forgotten.

Thus was Fred rated by the people of Mapleton, many of whom he met on coming from the mill. As he passed up the street towards his home some of them spoke to him in a strained, unnatural manner, others looked at him in a knowing way, and a few small boys crowded about him, as though he was on exhibition.

Here and there, also, curious feminine heads appeared at the windows, and though Fred walked with his eyes apparently fixed upon the ground, they were turned upward sufficiently to catch glimpses of certain well known forms, and he believed himself the subject of their thoughts and conversation.

Once he raised his head as if by an irresistible impulse, for he was then passing the residence of Dr. Dutton. Why he did so he could not satisfy himself, for he half expected to see Miss Nellie at the window, and he dreaded meeting her eyes; yet there was a strange fascination about the house, and with this sense of dread, strong as it was, he was conscious of a much stronger desire to look on her sweet face, hoping that her eyes might show at least a kindly feeling towards him, if nothing more. But instead of Nellie he saw her mother, who seemed looking directly at him.

"She must have heard everything from the new clerk," thought Fred, and he fancied that in his single hasty glance he saw a look of mingled sympathy and sorrow.

He knew her for a noble, tender hearted woman, one who had shown him many a kindness, and who possessed such delicacy of feeling that she had never referred in his presence to that wretched night when he called there in a state of intoxication.

When our young friend reached home, he was despondent, as you may imagine. He threw himself upon the lounge, and thought over the occurrences of the morning—of his unsuccessful attempt to get work, and of the general attitude of the people—and it seemed to his young and sensitive mind that he could not bear their unjust suspicions.

Then he remembered the kindness of Mr. Farrington, who had promised to assist him in trying to clear his reputation, and expressed a desire to aid him in other ways. The thought made him sincerely thankful that he had been one of Mr. Farrington's scholars in Sunday school, and had thereby gained the friendship of such a man. To have a friend like him at this time was worth everything, for Mr. Farrington was a prominent man and had great influence throughout the village.

Our young friend remained at home the rest of the day. In the evening his friend Dave called.

"Tell me how it all happened, Fred," said he, taking him by the hand with a friendly grasp.

"I suppose you have heard the whole story long before this."

"Yes, but I want to hear your side, and then I shall know the truth."

"Thank you, Dave, for your confidence in me. I only wish others had half as much. Yes, I am through at the old store that I thought so much of."

"But is it possible you were discharged, as I heard at school?"

"Yes, I was discharged," replied Fred sorrowfully. "I tell you, Dave," he continued, "it is pretty hard to be discharged on an unjust suspicion, and to be looked upon in the village as I am tonight."

"It's too bad! I'm sorry for you, Fred, and I think De Vere is the cause of the whole trouble."

"I don't see how he could have been at the bottom of what came up yesterday between Mr. Rexford and me."

"Well, I believe, from what he said, that he was the means of your first trouble, and I can't see why you won't charge him with it, and not

let every one think he is so nice and that you are guilty."

"What has he said?" asked Fred eagerly, thinking perhaps Matthew had exultingly told the boys his trick.

"He told Tom Martin that he was glad you showed up as you did, for it gave the people a chance to see what kind of a fellow you were."

"Was that all he said?"

"No; Tom said to him that he supposed he and you were great friends, as he had seen you together so much. De Vere replied that he knew what he was about, and had gained his point. That's all I heard. Isn'that enough?"

"Oh, that doesn't count for anything!" replied Fred, turning the matter off. "But tell me," he continued, "what was said at school about me. You said you heard the report there."

"Do you really want me to tell you?"

"Yes; I am not expecting anything complimentary, and may as well know the worst."

Dave Farrington hesitated a moment, unwilling to repeat the unkind words of Fred's former schoolmates.

"The worst came from De Vere," he said at length.

Fred's face colored.

"I expected this," he replied; "but what did he say?"

"When I got to the school house for the afternoon session, De Vere was there, and knowing that I always stood up for you, he cried out in a sneering way:

"'Well, Farrington, what have you to say for your friend Worthington now? I suppose, of course, you know what he has done, and that John Rexford discharged him last night?'

"I said, 'Yes, I know about his discharge, but I don't know that he has done anything to deserve it.'

"'He stole some money from the drawer,' he returned.

"'How do you know that?' I asked.

"'Why, everybody says so! I always said that you would get enough of him,' he replied.

"'That is no proof, and, besides, I want you to know I haven't enough of him yet,' said I. 'I have not been friends with him for the same reason that you were, nor do I propose to leave him under such circumstances.' I guess that must have hit him pretty hard, for he colored up as red as could be and acted mad."

Fred found it difficult to restrain his anger as he saw the bitter enmity of De Vere, and realized his gratification over his own misfortune—a misfortune of which Matthew was the cause. But he finally asked what the other scholars had to say about him.

"Well, they all talked about the matter, and most of them seemed to think that you were guilty, though Grace Bernard said she heard her father say that there might have been some mistake about the bill, and that she didn't believe you stole it, for you were always one of the best boys in school."

"That's better than I expected," replied Fred, with a brighter look. "But is that all?" he asked, with some anxiety.

Dave noticed this, and suspecting his meaning, hesitated. "I guess it is about all," he answered.

Fred seemed disappointed at not getting the answer he sought. Seeing he was not likely to get at what interested him most—Miss Nellie's opinion—he asked openly if she were not there, and what she said.

"I don't remember exactly what she said," replied Dave, "but she seemed to side with Matthew. You know they are pretty intimate now; he seems to have better success there than when you went to school. I tell you what it is, Fred, if you hadn't got tipsy, he wouldn't have had much show, but that's what killed you. The girls all said more about that than they did about this."

Fred had his answer now, and it was anything but welcome intelligence to him. There is no denying that he cared more for Nellie's good

opinion than for what all the rest of the school thought of him.

"She has condemned me at once," he said to himself bitterly, "while Grace Bernard has proved my friend; and she has not only condemned me without reason, but has taken up with my enemy—with that scoundrel De Vere, who has been the cause of all my trouble."

XIII.

FRED was keenly affected by the spirit Nellie had shown concerning him. That she had no faith in him, and cared nothing for his downfall, seemed evident, while the thought that she had gone over to De Vere and joined with him in his utterances galled our hero sorely.

Then, too, the fact that Matthew and Nellie had been so much together during the last few weeks stirred Fred's jealousy and indignation, as will be seen in the following letter, which he wrote and mailed that evening:

MAPLETON, Nov. 26.

MISS NELLIE DUTTON:—I understand that there is a report circulating in the school that I am guilty of dishonesty, and that you seem quite ready to accept it. I am not surprised that gossips should tell such a story, but I did not expect you to be one of the first to put faith in it and condemn me. You have known me intimately since we were little children, and, I am sure, you have no true reason for believing this wicked slander. Grace Bernard stood by me, I hear, while you did not. I suppose you are no longer my friend, since you find so much pleasure in the society of such a fellow as Matthew De Vere, who is, as you know, my enemy. You probably got your idea of my conduct from him, as I understand he was very much elated over my misfortune. This matter will all be shown up in time, and when it is I shall have the satisfac-

tion of seeing you regret your present intimacy with one who has no honor. Perhaps you may then be sorry for the treatment you are now showing me. Since that wretched night when I was led to your house by a certain person you have turned against me and avoided me. Had you not done so, I could have explained to you in confidence what I have preferred to keep secret. But since you judge me so hastily, and seem so happy in the presence of De Vere, I will not trouble you with my side of the story. FRED WORTHINGTON.

During the day Mr. Farrington gave a great deal of careful thought to the mystery that now enveloped his young friend, and in the morning he called upon Mr. Rexford, to see if he could learn anything that would be to Fred's advantage. After chatting awhile with the merchant, he said, as if he were entirely ignorant of what had taken place :

"Where is Fred?"

"He is not here."

"Out delivering goods?"

"No; he is through here. I discharged him."

"Discharged him!" returned Mr. Farrington, with seeming surprise.

"Yes; I don't want him any longer."

"I thought he was an excellent clerk."

"Yes, he was, in some respects; but I suspected him of dishonesty, and so let him go."

In the conversation that followed, the trader confirmed the statements of Fred in every particular. It was a good bit of tact on the part of

Mr. Farrington to draw Rexford out as he did, for not only did it prove that Fred had told the truth, but the merchant's manner gave him some ideas which he thought would prove valuable in solving the money mystery.

When Fred called at the mill to see Mr. Farrington at the time appointed, the latter greeted him cheerfully.

"Good morning, my boy; I see you are on time," looking at his handsome gold watch.

"Yes, I believe so; I always try to keep my appointments."

"That is in your favor."

"Thank you, Mr. Farrington. I hope it is. But have you seen Mr. Rexford?"

"Yes, I just came from there."

"Did you learn anything new?" asked Fred, with breathless interest.

"No; not exactly new."

"I suppose you went over the matter with Mr. Rexford?"

"Yes, he told the story practically as you gave it, but during our conversation I gathered a few points that may be of service to us."

"What is your theory, Mr. Farrington?"

"As it is little more than a suspicion at best, I think it would be wiser to keep it to myself at present."

"But if I knew it couldn't I help you?"

"No, I think not, and it might even make matters worse. The only way to work up this affair is to do it quietly. If others find out what is going on, perhaps we shall never be able to locate the money. Besides, it wouldn't do for it to get out that I am working up your case."

"But I would say nothing about it," put in Fred, whose curiosity and interest were both excited as he thought that perhaps Mr. Farrington had the secret that would free him from suspicion and prove his honesty.

"I don't doubt that in the least; but for good reasons of my own I will say nothing of my theory until I test it thoroughly, though it may take a long time. If it should prove to be the true solution of the mystery, I will then tell you all about it."

Fred colored a little at this, for he had grown somewhat sensitive now, and said earnestly:

"I hope, Mr. Farrington, you too don't suspect me. It almost seems——"

"Oh, no, my boy," interrupted his good friend, "don't worry about that. My suspicions run in a totally different direction."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, for I didn't know but Mr. Rexford had convinced you that I took the bill."

"No, indeed; I believe you are innocent, and I shall do all I can to aid you."

"You are very kind to me, and I thank you sincerely."

"I am glad to help you, Fred. It is my duty to do all the good I can."

"And you are always helping some one," replied Fred gratefully. "Now that I can do nothing to clear up this mystery, I would like to get to work. Can you give me anything to do?" he continued.

"Yes; I have arranged a place for you temporarily down stairs on the 'flockers.' You said yesterday that you would like factory work better than nothing. This is about the meanest job in the whole mill, but it is the only thing that I can possibly give you."

"All right; I guess I can stand it for a while," returned Fred.

"Then you may try it and see how you get along. I will advance you as soon as there is a vacancy—if I find that you deserve it," he added, with a significant smile.

"Very well, sir; I shall try to satisfy you. When shall I commence?"

"You may come in tomorrow morning at the regular hour—six o'clock. I will discharge Tim Short tonight."

"Oh, you are not going to send him away simply to give me a place, are you?" inquired Fred, with evident regret.

"No; I should never discharge one for such a cause, even if I wanted the place for my own brother. I have been looking around for several days, trying to find a boy, as I had made up my mind to get rid of Tim, who isn't faithful in his work."

"I am sorry to have him discharged; I would rather go without work myself than to feel I have his place. His parents will be obliged to support him, and they are very poor."

"I like to hear you talk that way, for it shows that you have a kind heart. I, too, am sorry for them, but it will not do to let sympathy interfere with the proper management of business. Such a course would not be just to my employers, for I am convinced that Tim causes more mischief than a little, every day."

"Then if you are bound to discharge him any way, there would be nothing wrong in my taking the place, would there?"

"Certainly not. Some one else will have it if you don't."

Mr. Farrington's assurance that there would be nothing dishonorable in the proposed course seemed to satisfy Fred's compunctions to some extent; still, as he entered the mill the next morning at the call of the shrill whistle, long before daylight, he could not help feeling a little guilty. He also felt that he was entering upon

a new career, and one that seemed anything but pleasing. An utter change had taken place in his life. He was now only a common factory hand, and was about to begin work as such.

The "flockers" were located under the stairs, down in the basement of the mill, in a dark and dingy corner. When Fred arrived there, he saw standing beside one of the machines a medium sized man with small gray eyes, that were shaded with immense bushy brows nearly an inch in length. His features were dull and expressionless, and over the lower portion of his wrinkled face a scraggy, mud colored beard seemed struggling for existence. His clothing appeared to indicate a penurious, grasping nature.

A single look at this uncouth specimen was sufficient to make our young friend shudder at the thought of being under his control; however, he walked straight up to him, and said:

"Is this Mr. Hanks?"

"That's my name—Christopher Hanks. Be you the new boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's yer name?"

"My name is Fred Worthington."

"Fred Worthington, d'ye say?"

"Yes, sir."

"I s'pose yer father's the cobbler?"

"He has a shoe shop, sir."

"Be you the chap I heerd them men speakin' of as stole some money?" said Hanks, with a fiendish grin, which revealed two upper front teeth that seemed long because they alone guarded that portion of his mouth. They had been in use so many years, or had been so poorly treated, that they were loose, and rattled together.

"Perhaps they referred to me, sir," retorted Fred with dignity, "but they had no right to accuse me of stealing."

"Yis, yis; that's how such allers talks. But I guess thar ain't nothin' here fer yer to git yer hands on to, 'ceptin' work—I'll see't yer ain't sufferin' fer that."

"Very well, sir; I came here to work."

"I s'pose ye're perty strong, ain't yer?"

"I'm strong enough for a boy."

"Glad yer are, fer yer can do the liftin' work an' help Carl there. He ain't good for much, any way. Tim Short used ter shirk on him 'ceptin' when I knowed it, an'—— Hey! here she goes!" (as the machinery suddenly started). "Set this 'ere flocker again, Carl, and then show this feller how to run t'other. I'll start up the grinder, an' go up to the drier."

Accordingly Christopher Hanks departed, while Fred put on a gingham frock which his mother had made him as a working blouse, and, at the hands of Carl, received his first lesson,

XIV.

A "FLOCKER" is a large, clumsy looking wooden machine, four or five feet in length, and just wide enough to take on the cloth, which at that mill was all made double width. It consists chiefly of heavy rollers, so arranged that the cloth passes between them. There is a deep pit at the bottom of the machine, which will hold several bushels of "flocks," in addition to the bulk of a large web of cloth, from forty to fifty yards in length.

"Your name is Carl, I believe," said Fred, by way of introducing himself.

"Yes, Carl; that's it."

"My name is Fred Worthington. I think we shall get along together."

"I hope so," returned Carl sincerely, and continued: "The first thing to do is to put the cloth into the machine and set it running."

Then, showing how to do this, he added:

"Now we start it up by switching this belt so" (moving the belt from the loose to the stationary pulley).

"What's the object in running cloth through here?" inquired Fred; for though he had always

lived in Mapleton, yet in truth his knowledge of a woolen factory was very limited, and in this respect he did not differ much from the majority of the villagers.

"It is to make it weigh more, and to give it a body, so it can be finished," replied the boy, while he turned a basketful of flocks upon the revolving rollers between which the beaver cloth was now swiftly passing.

"But why do you call that stuff 'flocks'?" inquired Fred. "It looks like the fine dust that we find at the end of our pants and coats, where it settles down against the hems."

"Well, that's just what it is."

"I thought everybody called that shoddy."

"I know they do, and I used to do so myself before I came here."

"But what are the 'flocks' that we have here made of?"

"Old rags."

"I thought shoddy was made from old rags."

"They are both made from them. The best ones are put into shoddy, and the odds and ends into flocks."

"Well, if this stuff is flocks, how is shoddy made, and what does it look like?"

"It is something like wool. The rags are fed into a 'picker' up in the 'pick room,' and come out all torn apart."

"What is it used for then?"

"It is mixed with a little coarse wool, and carded into rope yarn, the same as wool, ready to be spun."

"The idea of weaving shoddy into cloth is new to me. It can't make very good cloth."

"Well, they only use it for the back of the cloth. Here, look at this piece! See; it is white on one side and brown on the other. The white side is the face, and is made from good wool. You see we are beating these flocks in on the back side."

"Yes, I see you are; and now as you've told me about shoddy, I'd like to know about flocks, for that's what I have got to handle, I suppose."

"I guess you'll know all you want to about them before you've been here long. I'm 'bout dead from being in this dust so much. It fills a feller all up. See how thick it is now, and you're drawing it in with every breath."

By this time the other machine was ready for action, and Carl, finding that they were short of flocks, gave Fred a basket, took another himself, and both boys started for a fresh supply. They went up stairs, passed through the "gig room," and across a long hall which opened into a little room by itself, where the rag grinders were humming away. This was their destination. Carl filled one of the baskets with flocks

and the other with ground rags; then turning to Fred, said:

"You wanted to know about flocks and how they are made. This is the first machine they go through. You see that pile of rags and odds and ends. When they have been run through here, they will come out cut up fine, like those I just put in your basket. Now we will go back, and I will show you the next process they go through."

Each of the boys now shouldered his basket and returned down the stairs. There Carl turned his flocks upon the cloth that was rapidly being filled, and then emptied the contents of the other basket into a tub or tank, which was about five feet wide by fifteen long. It was full of thick, muddy looking water, which was rapidly going round the tank.

It struck Fred as a curious proceeding when he saw the fine cut rags thrown into that place; it looked to him very much like throwing them away, and he was about to ask an explanation when Carl satisfied his curiosity by saying:

"This is the wet grinder. We put the rags in here, and run them in water about three hours until they are ground up as fine as can be, and look just like porridge."

"What do you do with the porridge?"

"Do you see these little bags at this end of the tank? We bail it out into them, and after the

water strains out a little, we tie them up and load them on one of these cars and run them out to the 'extractor.'"

"What kind of a thing is an extractor?"

"It is something that shakes the water out. It has a big basket inside that goes around like lightning."

"I'd like to see it; where is it?"

"Come into this next room; here it is."

On entering the room Fred's eyes fairly stuck out with amazement. He had already seen more queer machines that morning than he had ever imagined had been made, but here was something that surpassed them all. It consisted of a large cast iron cylinder, about six feet in diameter and four feet high. Inside was a wire basket, which nearly filled up the vacant space. This rested on a pivot, and from the top of it extended upward a short shaft, the end of which was connected with a small pulley.

The tender of the machine had just put in two whole pieces of double width beaver cloth dripping wet from the washers, and was now starting up the machine slowly.

Pretty soon it commenced to whirl around rather rapidly, then the speed increased as the power was let on, until a buzz was heard, which quickly gave way to a singing, hissing sound; now followed a spark, then another and another

in quick succession, and the whole rim of the extractor seemed a perfect blaze.

Fred thought it was going to pieces, and jumped backward for safety; but by the time he got where he supposed himself out of danger the tender had shifted the belt to the loose pulley, and by applying the brake had stopped the whirl of the basket.

Carl laughed at Fred's timidity, and said:

"What were you frightened about? The extractor 'most always does that way, only it was a little worse this time, because it probably wasn't loaded even. That's why the fire flew so. Just see how it took the water out of the cloth. That's the way it does to the flocks."

Fred felt the cloth, and, knowing that two minutes before it was sopping wet, now found it was only a little damp. The boys returned to the flockers and straightened out the cloth and got it running even; then Carl took a car load of the extracted flocks up to the drier, where they were spread thinly upon it.

The drier is simply a frame upon which is nailed a large surface of wire sieving, directly under which are coils of hot steam pipes. On this drier the flocks become baked dry, and are about as hard as dry mud.

"It seems to me that these rags have to go through different machines enough before they

get ready for use. I wonder what the next step is?" said Fred.

"Only one more machine—the one where you saw me fill my basket with flocks. I suppose you noticed that it had a big hopper on top? Well, we just turn these dry lumps right in here, and let them grind out as fast as they will."

"Then I've been the rounds of our work, have I?" asked Fred.

"Yes, unless Mr. Hanks makes you lug the cloth down."

"Am I supposed to obey him?"

"Yes, he's your boss; and you will be lucky if you have no trouble with him."

"I shall try to have no trouble, even if he is as disagreeable as he looks; but I will not be crowded too much."

"I wouldn't if I was strong like you," returned Carl sadly.

"I thought Mr. Farrington had charge of this room," said Fred, after a pause.

"He does; though I believe he had a lot of trouble to keep these flockers a-going; it is such bad, dirty work that no one would stay on them. So he made a trade with Mr. Hanks, and let him the job of making the flocks and putting them into the cloth, and agreed to furnish him two boys. I don't know how much pay he gets out of it, but Jack Hickey, that's scouring the wool

there in the other corner, says he is making money out of us every day; besides, he shirks the work upon us, and we have it almost all to do."

"Hanks—Christopher Hanks," said Fred to himself, with a curious drawl through his nose; "not a pleasant sounding name."

VI.

THOUGH Matthew De Vere was much gratified at Fred's misfortunes, and especially pleased at his own renewed friendship with Nellie Dutton, he was nevertheless far from happy. Time was going by rapidly—almost flying—and no money had been raised to meet his promise to Jacob Simmons. The three hundred dollars was constantly in his mind. Where and how could it be raised?"

The problem tormented him day and night, and he could see no solution to it. He did not dare to speak to his father about the money, for the latter would then find out everything, and would be sure to punish him severely. Matthew did not look upon such an outcome with any degree of favor. He considered himself a young man, and did not propose to be treated with the rod.

On the other hand, there stared him in the face Jacob Simmons' threat of exposure and arrest. The situation was desperate. The money must be got, whether or no, and yet how could it be procured?

If he failed in raising it, the boy he hated

would be vindicated, while he would be shown up and disgraced before all the village. Nellie would have nothing more to do with him—would not so much as look at him—and she would, he reasoned, again become friendly with Fred, and then he would have no power to break it off as he had recently done. She would be lost to him, and his rival would reign in his stead.

"No, no! This shall not be!" he said angrily, and spurned the thought from him; but it as quickly returned. He tried to forget it, but could not. The pressure from Jacob Simmons forced it back upon his mind, and it remained there and tormented him till he was almost mad.

In this condition of mind he went to school next day, hoping that a pleasant greeting and a few smiles from Nellie would dissipate the vision that had so haunted him. Perhaps they would have done so, but he had not the pleasure of testing so desirable a remedy.

Nellie came late—after school had commenced.

"It is just my luck that she should be late today," he thought, "when she is always so punctual."

He often looked toward her seat, but could not catch her eye. She seemed unusually busy with her books.

Matthew did not know what to make of it.

He looked at his watch—a handsome gold one that his father had given him as a birthday present. It wanted only fifteen minutes of recess time.

"I will see her then," thought Matthew.

The bell rang, and the scholars left their seats and passed out into the anteroom—all save those who wished to remain and study.

Matthew grew anxious as Nellie did not come out with the other girls. Recess was half gone. He made an excuse to go to his seat on the pretense of getting something, but really to try and speak to Nellie. She was with the teacher, however, who was assisting her to work a difficult example.

Matthew returned to the anteroom angry. He could not bear the disappointment gracefully.

"She avoids me for some cause," he said to himself, and then wondered what it could be. "Last night," he reflected, "we were the best of friends. Can it be possible that Simmons has already told the secret? He threatened yesterday that he would unless I made a payment."

The thought made him wretched. He was unfit for study, and wanted to get out to learn if any such report had actually been circulated.

On the reassembling of school he obtained a dismissal for the day on the plea of feeling ill. He was ill—very ill at ease in his mind, beset as

it was with fears, and troubled over the sudden change in Nellie's manner toward him.

On his way from school he met Tim Short. He was glad to see him, and yet shuddered for fear he would say it was all up with them.

"What brings you here at this time?" finally asked Matthew.

"I was going up to school to see you."

"What has happened that you want to see me?" queried Matthew, dreading the answer.

"I have been discharged."

"Is that all?" drawing a long breath of relief.

"Isn't that enough?" asked Tim indignantly.

"It might be worse; but what were you discharged for?"

"Discharged to give Fred Worthington my place, I suppose," answered Tim, with evident ill feeling toward Fred.

"Is it possible? And has he your place?"

"Yes, he went to work this morning."

"I think you have as much cause now as I have to be down on him."

"Yes, and more too," returned Tim savagely.

"On his account we got into this trouble with Simmons, and are liable to be exposed any day," said Matthew.

Tim turned pale. "I thought you promised to fix that," he replied.

"So I did, but I have not been able to raise the money. Now, something has got to be done at once. Let us go up to the pines and decide what it shall be."

Tim assented, and the two boys soon found themselves quite alone in the thick pine grove just outside of the village.

Now the change Nellie Dutton showed toward Matthew was not caused, as he supposed, by any disclosure from Jacob Simmons, but by the letter she had received from Fred in the morning before going to school.

It made a deep impression upon her. She was impulsive, like nearly all girls of her age, and did not stop to reason much about Fred's case, especially since Matthew urged his opinions upon her with such assurance. Her intimacy with Matthew was not from any great regard that she had for him, but because her nature seemed to demand some favorite, and when her friendship with Fred ceased, for reasons with which the reader is already familiar, she accepted Matthew's attentions with a little more than ordinary courtesy.

Now she saw she had judged Fred hastily, and the statement in his letter, that she had not proved as good a friend as Grace Bernard, touched her as nothing else had ever done. She admitted the truth of his assertion, and felt truly sorry that she had not been more loyal to him.

"I shall regret my present intimacy with one who has no honor," she mused. "He must have meant Matthew, and I wonder if he referred to him in saying, 'when I was led to your house on that wretched night by a certain person.'" This thought once having taken shape grew upon her.

Nellie studied over Fred's letter, reading it again and again. "You know he is my enemy." She did not notice this before, but now it recalls the night of the party. "Yes, Fred, I do know it," she said to herself almost audibly, "but I had almost forgotten the spite he showed you."

This thought placed Matthew under suspicion, and went far toward helping Fred's cause, though he was now so thoroughly under a cloud.

Nellie found herself repeating over this sentence: "Grace Bernard stood by me while you did not." She could hardly drive it from her thoughts, but why it clung so to her she did not suspect. That evening she wrote an answer to Fred's letter, and sealed it ready to mail in the morning.

The night was cloudy and dark. A cold November wind from the northeast swept over the little village—so icy and damp that none cared to venture out.

There was no trade for the merchants, and

they closed their stores early and hurried shivering to their homes. By ten o'clock not a light was anywhere to be seen.

All had retired, and nearly all had entered into happy dreamland when they were suddenly awakened by the shrill cry of "Fire! fire! fire!"

Soon the words were taken up by others and yet others till every person in the village was aroused and startled by the sound.

XVI.

A FIRE in a country village is a great event. There is but one other attraction that approaches it in importance, and that is the annual circus.

Both bring out the entire village, but the fire draws the better of the two. It is a free show, while the circus is not, and here it has an immense advantage over the latter—an advantage that can hardly be overcome by the clowns and menagerie. It gives the men, the boys too, a chance to be brave—to do daring deeds and a large number of foolish ones. Then there is the mystery of how it caught, and whether it was the work of an incendiary or not. Why, a good sized fire in a village will often serve for months as a theme for discussion when other subjects are scarce.

This particular fire was the largest Mapleton had ever known. Every one had hurriedly dressed, and rushed down the street to see John Rexford's store burn. Women and children insufficiently wrapped for the chilly air of this cold November night stood there watching the

angry flames as they shot high in the air, fed by barrels of oil and lard. It was a grand sight to witness, as the blackness of the night made the flames doubly brilliant.

Nothing could be done to save the store, and the men directed their efforts to keeping the flames from spreading. In this they did a good work. John Rexford did not arrive at the scene until the building was a sheet of flame and the roof had fallen in. The sight almost crazed him. He flew at the door as if to enter amid the burning goods and secure certain valuables, but the fierce flames drove him back. He reluctantly yielded, and in his helplessness seemed the picture of despair as he saw before him his store—his idol—a mass of blazing timbers and half burned goods.

He was now without a store, even as Fred was without a clerkship, and could perhaps realize to some extent how the latter felt at being suddenly thrown out of his chosen vocation.

Fred was there too. He stood a little back from the front of the crowd, and at one side, intently watching the progress of the flames, and seemingly wrapped in thought. Finally he turned his head, and a little to the right of him saw Nellie and her mother. Nellie was looking directly at him, evidently studying his face. When his eyes met hers and she found that she

was discovered, a blush, plainly visible by the light of the flames, covered her pretty face.

Fred felt his heart beat faster. He longed to speak with her and learn her thoughts, and yet he did not dare approach her. The peculiar look she gave him, and that vivid blush—what did it mean? He could not make up his mind upon these points, and yet there was a fascination in studying them, for he sometimes persuaded himself that they meant one thing, and then again perhaps its very opposite.

Presently she and her mother returned home, and Fred saw no more of them.

The fire was now under control. All danger of its spreading was passed, and the crowd returned to their several homes well nigh chilled through. A few men remained to watch the fire as it died away, and to see that no sparks were carried to other buildings by the strong east wind.

Among those who remained was John Rexford. He was pale and haggard, and shivered, while the cold wind seemed to penetrate his very bones, yet he clung to the spot as if he would pluck the mystery—the cause of the fire—from the burning mass before him. Finally he approached Mr. Coombs, the sheriff, and said:

"Who was the first to discover this fire?"

"I was," replied the sheriff proudly, with a

feeling that he must be looked upon as something of a hero.

"Did you see it from your house?"

"No; I saw it just as I turned the corner, coming toward the stable."

"Coming which way?" asked the merchant, trying to learn something that might give him a clew to work upon.

"Coming from the Falls, of course, where I had been attending court."

"What time was that?"

"Nigh on to eleven o'clock."

"And you saw no one here?"

"No."

"Nor any one on the street?"

"Not a soul stirring, except Jim, the stable boy."

"Where was he?"

"Sound asleep."

"He couldn't have been stirring very much then," said the merchant, with a show of disgust.

"Well, I mean he was the only one about, and I had to wake him up."

"And you raised the alarm?"

"I should think I did."

"Then you didn't come directly here?"

"Yes, I did, but I yelled fire pretty lively all the same, and started the stable boy up the street to wake everybody up."

"Where was the fire burning then?"

"On the back end of the store. A blaze was just starting up through the roof."

"It was on the back end, you say?"

"Yes; and just as I got here the back windows burst out, and the way the flames rolled up was a caution."

"Was there no fire in the front store then?"

"No, there didn't seem to be when I first got here, but after I went round to the rear end to see how it was there, and came back, the flames had come through, and everything was ablaze. I tell you what, I never saw anything burn like it."

"It must have started in the back store, then," said Mr. Rexford thoughtfully.

"No doubt of it," returned officer Coombs.

"This is important evidence," said the merchant, after a pause.

The sheriff brightened up at this, and his eyes snapped with delight. Here was a case for official service.

"To be sure it is, sir," he replied.

"There is some mystery about this."

"'Pears to me so."

"We had no stove in the back store."

"I know it—that's so, Mr. Rexford. It looks bad."

"And I closed up the store myself tonight,

and went into the back room, as usual, to see that everything was all right."

"I dare say it was. You are a careful man."

"Yes, it was all right. I'm certain of that."

"Good evidence, too. Capital evidence, Mr. Rexford," said the officer, rubbing his hands together with evident delight.

"You are sure there was no fire in the front room when you first got here?"

"I am positive there was none."

"I may want your testimony."

"I hope so, sir, for crime should be punished."

"I hope it will, in this case, at least," said the merchant; "for I believe this store has been fired, and perhaps robbed."

"Shouldn't wonder if it had been robbed—more than likely it was, now I think of it."

"But as everything is burned up, it will be almost impossible to find this out, as I can't really miss anything."

"There will be a chance for some pretty sharp detective work, I should say."

"You are good at that, I believe," said the merchant.

"Well, I fancy they can't fool me much, if I do say it."

"Then I want you to go to work on this case."

"I will commence at once, Mr. Rexford.

The guilty party can't escape me when I give my whole mind to it."

"I hope you will put your whole mind on it, then."

"I shall indeed, sir. I will go home now and form my theory. I have the facts to work on. Early in the morning I will see you, and we will compare notes and get ready for business—active business, I assure you."

XVII.

AFTER being out during the night at the fire, and consequently having had his rest broken, Fred found it rather irksome to spring out of bed at five o'clock, get his breakfast, and be ready to respond to the factory whistle on a wintry morning.

He had now got sufficient knowledge of his work, and found very little difficulty in performing it. Whenever he wanted any instruction or help, Carl seemed ready and glad to aid him, so the two boys soon became friends.

"How long have you been on these flockers, Carl?" asked Fred the morning after the fire.

"Only two months."

"Where did you work before that? I don't remember ever having seen you till yesterday morning, and I don't know what your last name is now. I heard Mr. Hanks call you Carl, so I suppose that is your given name?"

"Yes, my name is Carl Heimann; I have been in here ever since I came to Mapleton."

"Where did you come from?"

"My father and mother came from Germany

when I was a small boy, and they lived in Rhode Island; but they both got sick and died, so I came here to live with my uncle."

"What is your uncle's name?" Fred went on to inquire.

"His name is Frank Baumgarten."

"Oh, I've seen him plenty of times. I used to take goods to his house from the store. It seems queer that I never saw you."

"I don't go out any nights, for I get tired out by working in here eleven hours and a half every day, I can tell you," said Carl.

"Yes, I should think you would; you don't look very strong."

"Well, I guess I can get along better now that you are here; but Tim Short used to shirk and crowd me. If Mr. Hanks would do his part of the work it wouldn't be so hard; but he won't do it, and is cross and finds fault if we don't hurry things up."

When Fred's eyes first fell upon the pale, sad face of Carl, and he noticed his dwarfed and disfigured form, he had a feeling of pity for him. There was that about his manner which at once interested him. The boy's features were good, and yet they had that sharp, shrunken appearance which may be said to be characteristic of the majority of those afflicted with spinal trouble. He was a little humpback, who, from his size,

would be taken for a lad of not more than thirteen, though he was then seventeen, one year older than Fred, as the latter afterward learned.

The interest our hero felt in Carl had gradually increased as he noticed how intelligent he appeared, and when he said that he had no father nor mother, and told how he had been treated, Fred's sympathy was touched, and he said to himself, almost unconsciously, "I'm glad I'm here, for now I can do the heavy work, and will protect him from the abuse of this man Hanks!" Then he said to the boy (for he seemed but such beside his own sturdy form), "Yes, I think you will get along better now, for I am strong and well, and will do all the heavy work for you."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" replied Carl, with a sense of gratitude which showed itself in his bright eyes, "for it hurts my back every time I lift one of the heavy bags of wet flocks, and almost makes me think I will have to give up the job. Then I think my uncle can't support me, and so I keep on."

"You shall not lift any more of them while I am here. I would rather do that, any way, than stay here in the dust."

"How long will you be here?" asked the little humpback, anxious lest the brighter prospect might last but a short time.

"I don't know. I don't want to stay in the factory any longer than I am obliged to; but that may be forever," replied Fred, with a clouded brow, as his mind reverted to the cause that brought him down to such work.

"I don't see why you need to stay in here. You have been clerk in a store, and have a good education, I suppose. If I only had an education——"

"Haven't you ever been to school?"

"I went to school a little in the old country, and three terms in Rhode Island; then I went into the factory. My father was sick, and couldn't work. After I had been in there about a year, my coat caught one day in the shafting and wound me round it so they had to shut down the water wheel to get me off. Everybody thought I was dead. That's what hurt my back and made it grow the way it is now."

"How long ago was that?" inquired Fred sympathetically.

"It was six years ago that I got hurt, but I did not get out of bed for almost two years afterward."

"Does your back trouble you now?"

"Yes, it aches all the time; but I've got rather used to it. Only when I do a lot of lifting here, it bothers me so I can't sleep."

"That's too bad. I'm sorry for you, and, as I

said, will do all the heavy work. Then you didn't go to school any after you got out again?"

"No; I went back into the mill and stayed until my mother died; then I came here."

"Did you say your father was dead?"

"Yes; he died while I was sick."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"No; I have no one but my uncle."

"I suppose he is kind to you?"

"Yes, he is; but Aunt Gretchen don't seem to like me very well, she has so many children of her own."

"I should think you would board somewhere else, then."

"My uncle wants me to stay with him. If I boarded at the factory boarding house my wages wouldn't more than pay my board, and I shouldn't have anything left to buy my clothes with. If I should leave him and then get sick he wouldn't take care of me, and I should have to go to the poorhouse. I have always dreaded that since the city helped us when we were all sick."

"Well, you will soon be strong enough, I hope, to get another job, where there is more pay."

This conversation was now interrupted by the appearance of Hanks, who said to Fred:

"Come along up stairs with me, Worthington; I want yer ter help me lug some cloth down. I'll show yer where ter find it; then yer kin git it

yerself erlone. Yer look stout 'nuff ter handle it 's well as me."

Each shouldered a web of cloth which made a bundle about two feet through and six feet long —rather a heavy burden for a boy; still, Fred handled it easily and quickly, deposited it by the flockers, and turned to his superior for further orders.

"Take out them pieces next; they have run long enough. Carl will help you about doing it; then you may go up and bring down two more pieces."

With these orders he vanished, and the boys went to their work.

"How long do these have to be run?" asked Fred of the little humpback.

"About three hours. If they stayed in longer than that they would get too heavy."

"This light stuff don't make them so very much heavier, does it?"

"Oh, yes; we can beat in flocks enough to double the weight of the cloth."

"Is that so?" exclaimed the new hand incredulously; and then added, after a moment's thought, "But I should think they would all tumble out."

"I suppose they would if the cloth wasn't fulled as soon as we get through with it; but that sort of sets them in."

"Where do they full it?"

"Out in the fulling mills, near the extractor. Didn't you see those long wooden things with the covers turned back, and the cloth going up through them so fast?"

"Yes, I saw them, but didn't know what they were. I don't see how going through those fulls the cloth."

"It's the stuff they put in—fuller's earth and soap; they pile the soft soap in by the dishful, and it makes a great lather. I s'pose the fuller's earth is what does the most of the work. After the cloth comes out of the fulling mills it's 'bout twice as thick as when it goes in, and feels all stiff and heavy. It's no more like what it is now than nothing."

"What's the next process it goes through?"

"It goes into the washers next, and is washed as clean as can be."

"How did you learn so much about finishing cloth? You have been here but a little while."

"My father worked in a mill, and I have heard him talk about it. Then I have been in a factory enough myself to know pretty nearly everything that is done."

"Do we take the cloth direct from the weave room? It doesn't look as though anything had been done to it when it reaches us."

"It is 'burled' first; then we get it."

"'Burled'? What do you mean by that?"

"Why, the knots are all cut off. You see the weavers have to tie their warp on the back side when it breaks, and that is what makes the knots."

"I don't see what harm those little things would do, as you say they are on the back of the cloth."

"They are the worst things there are, for if one of them gets in by accident it is sure to make a hole through the cloth when it runs through the shears."

Thus, with work and talk, the day flew by almost before Fred was aware of it. In fact, the hours seemed shorter to him than any he had passed for weeks. Now there was something new to occupy his attention, and work enough to keep his hands busy. The many curious machines before him, of which Carl had told him a little, interested him much—so much, indeed, that even at the end of the first day he felt no small desire to know more of them.

XVIII.

IN the evening, after Fred's second day in the factory, as he sat with his parents in their pleasant home, and the thought of Carl and of his sad deformity and still sadder story recurred to him, he could not help contrasting the circumstances of the little humpback with his own.

Two mornings before, as he entered the mill, he had felt that his burden was almost greater than he could bear. He was disgraced and thrown out of his position, and was about entering upon a cheerless life, where there was but little opportunity for advancement.

But now, as he reflected upon his surroundings, he saw that he was much better off than many others. He had both father and mother, who loved and cared for him, who provided for him a cheerful home, and who would at any time sacrifice their own pleasures and comforts for his. Moreover, he was well and strong, and had the advantage of attending school, while Carl had been obliged to go into the mill at a little more than ten years of age, in order to earn something toward the support of his mother and invalid

father. It was while thus employed that he met with the terrible accident that so deformed him and blighted his young life.

"No wonder he looks so sad," said Fred to himself. "Perhaps he may be as ambitious to make a success in the world as I am, and yet he is thrown into the factory, and is probably glad of even such a place, and maybe he works hard at times when he is really unable to do anything. Poor boy! I don't see what prospects he can see ahead to cheer him on. He has neither friends, education, nor health, and with so small a chance as there is in the factory for advancement, I should think he might as well give up first as last; but as he has no home, I suppose he must earn a living somehow or starve. If he only had friends to take care of him, it would not be so hard on him; but I don't see how he can be very happy with a woman like his aunt, who is always spluttering about somebody or something."

Fred secretly determined to do all he could to help the little cripple, and made up his mind that Hanks should not abuse him in the future if he could help it. Then calling to mind Carl's remark that morning, which showed so clearly his desire for a better education, he felt he could aid him, and decided to do so.

"Any new evidence?" asked Sheriff Coombs,

as he met Mr. Rexford early in the morning at the scene of the fire.

"No, nothing except what we discussed last night."

"That is good as far as it goes."

"Well, it goes far enough to convince me," replied the merchant tartly.

"To be sure, sir, but we must convince the court. A mere suspicion, sir, is not good in law."

"You said last night you were the first one here, and that the fire started in the back store."

"So I did, but I can't say what caused the fire."

"It shows that it did not catch from the stove."

"That is so, and it leads us to suspect the store was set on fire—in fact, that is my belief. We stand agreed on this point; but the court must have evidence or we can't make out a case."

"Then we must search for evidence," said the merchant.

"My official duty, sir, is to bring the wrong-doer to justice, and I assure you I take a special interest in this case. I shall do my best work on it; but, by the way, there will be some slight expense connected with it."

"I don't understand you," replied the merchant nervously, for he caught the word "expense."

"Nothing of any consequence, to be sure, but of course you know a detective can't work without means."

"How much will it cost me?" asked the merchant, after a pause.

"I will make it light—for you almost nothing," answered the sheriff, who began to fear he would lose the opportunity to perform official service.

"Very well, then, you may go ahead; but I warn you not to come back on me with a heavy charge for this business."

"Your wishes shall be heeded, sir. I will commence now. By the way, do you suspect any one in particular?"

"Yes, I have one or two reasons for believing I know who did it."

"Good! That will give us an idea to work on; but first let me look around and see what I can discover for evidence."

On the rear side of the back room was a window. A few feet from this window part of a load of sawdust lay upon the ground. Here the sheriff found several footprints.

"How long has this sawdust been here?" he called out to Mr. Rexford.

"It was put there several days ago," he replied.

"I wish you would look here. I have made an important discovery."

The merchant quickly approached the spot.

"Do you see those footprints? When do you think they were made?"

"Last night about dark I shoveled up several basketfuls and carried them into the stable. These tracks must have been made since then."

"Do you feel sure of this?"

"I do, and I notice the prints point exactly to where the back window was."

"That is a good point, sir; but do you notice that whoever made that track must have had a small foot?"

"Yes, I see it is small, and that goes to strengthen my suspicions."

"It measures ten inches long and three wide," said the sheriff, applying his rule to the footprint.

In about an hour from this time Sheriff Coombs entered the woolen factory, and a minute or two later went to the flockers.

"Do you want to see me?" asked Fred, as he saw the officer fasten his eyes on him.

"Yes; I have a warrant for your arrest."

"For my arrest!" exclaimed Fred in amazement. "What for?"

"On complaint of John Rexford, for setting fire to his store," replied the sheriff, in a pompous manner.

XIX.

FRED stared at the sheriff in blank amazement at the terrible charge now brought against him.

"I am charged with setting fire to John Rexford's store?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"And you say Mr. Rexford makes the charge?" demanded Fred, in great excitement.

"Yes, he makes the charge," replied the officer, in a manner that was extremely irritating to our young hero.

"I don't know what it means," answered Fred.

"You know the store was burned, I suppose?" said the sheriff sarcastically.

"I do, sir; but what has that to do with me?"

"The question is one that must be answered by the court. My duty is to see that you appear there for trial."

"When will the trial be?" asked Fred, pale and depressed.

"At two o'clock this afternoon you must appear before Justice Plummer."

"Can I remain at work till then?"

"No; you must go with me."

"Is it necessary for me to go to the lockup?" asked Fred, shrinking with natural repugnance from such a place.

"It is, unless you can furnish surety for your appearance at the trial."

"If I promise to be there, isn't that enough?"

"I should not be doing my official duty to let you off on your promise," answered the sheriff.

"I would rather stay with you until two o'clock than go to the lockup."

"My time is worth too much to waste. I have a great deal of official business to attend to," said the officer; and after a pause, he added, "But if you were to give me five dollars, cash down, I think I could fix it for you."

"I haven't so much money with me, but I promise to pay it to you."

"I should prefer the cash."

Fred went to Mr. Farrington, accompanied by the sheriff, to try and borrow money enough to make up the five dollars, and to ask advice. His kind employer took him to one side and spoke low, so that the officer could not hear him. After getting the facts of the arrest, and asking a few questions, which were answered satisfactorily, Mr. Farrington turned to the sheriff and said:

"I am surprised, Mr. Coombs, that you should

try to scare this boy into paying you five dollars, with the threat of taking him to the lockup. I had a better opinion of you than this," he added emphatically.

Officer Coombs hung his head and colored. He lost the official bearing with which he had so impressed our young friend.

"I am responsible for his appearance at the trial," he at last answered, in defense of his position.

"Very well; that is no reason why you should take advantage of an innocent boy who knows nothing of the law. I will go surety for him, and will be present at the trial. If you want me to give a bond for his appearance I will do so."

"It would be right to have the bond, but I will not ask it from you. I have faith in you, you see," said the sheriff, trying to win back his good opinion by a bit of flattery.

Mr. Farrington shrugged his shoulders. Turning to Fred, he told him to go to his work, and promised that at the appointed time he would accompany him to the trial.

Of course Fred had to tell his parents at noon what had happened. They were alarmed at first at so grave a charge, but became calm, as they felt sure they could prove Fred was at home on the night of the fire.

"I think the tide will turn now, Fred," said

his father. "You have had more than your share of ill luck, but I am proud of you, that you stand up under fire like a man."

"I hope it has turned, father, and I am glad of your approval. This charge, though, seems to be one of malice."

"It does seem so; but we can tell at the trial whether it is or not."

Justice Plummer was a middle aged man, with a kind, intellectual face. He spoke slowly and thoughtfully. When our hero entered he greeted him in a kindly way.

"I am sorry to see you here, Fred," he began, "and I hope no evidence of guilt will be found against you. Though I feel a friendly interest in you, it is my duty, as you know, to decide the case impartially."

"I know it is, judge," replied Fred, "and I think the evidence will prove my innocence."

John Rexford now came in with his lawyer, Mr. Clarence Ham, a young man noted for his eloquence.

Mr. Rexford was sworn as a witness, and deposed that he had strong grounds for believing his store was burned by an incendiary, and that he had reasons for suspecting Fred Worthington to be the guilty party, though he admitted that he had little or no real proof to sustain this belief.

He gave his evidence upon the facts that led him to think the store was maliciously burned. Sheriff Coombs added his testimony upon this point. These facts, having been already given, need not be repeated.

"This testimony gives no absolute proof that the store was burned by an incendiary," said the judge.

"But I submit that the circumstances—the facts, if you please—lead to that conclusion," put in attorney Ham.

"To be sure, they give rise to a strong suspicion that it was, but unless we get further testimony to this end, the court cannot hold the prisoner for trial."

Mr. Rexford now gave his evidence, showing why he suspected Fred of being the guilty party.

This being simply a hearing before a justice, Mr. Farrington was allowed to serve Fred in place of a lawyer.

"You say," said Mr. Farrington, addressing the witness, "you thought at the time you discharged Fred Worthington from your employ that some sort of revenge would follow. Will you kindly state why you thought so?"

"His manner indicated it."

"In what way, please?"

"He was very saucy and impudent."

"In what manner was he impudent?"

"He threatened me."

"Simply because you informed him you wouldn't need his services longer?"

"Well, yes, that is about it," answered the witness hesitatingly.

"The court would like to know the exact facts," said Judge Plummer.

"I shall endeavor to give them," answered the witness.

"Then please state in what way he threatened you," said Mr. Farrington.

"It was in his manner. I had to conciliate him to save trouble. I was absolutely afraid of him."

"In what way did you conciliate him?"

"By modifying my statement."

"What was your statement?"

"It was something about his taking money from my drawer."

"You charged him, then, with stealing?"

"Not exactly."

"This was the point, however, that you modified?"

"Yes."

"Did that satisfy him?"

"Well, yes, it seemed to," admitted the witness reluctantly.

"Then, Mr. Rexford, your testimony shows that Fred Worthington did not complain at being

discharged, but at a statement which you had no right to make. I judge he simply acted as any proud spirited boy would have done."

John Rexford grew fidgety.

"Was there any other cause for his being impudent?"

"No."

"No question of settlement, I suppose?"

"Nothing worth speaking of," answered the witness, growing very nervous.

"As it may have some bearing upon this case, you will please state what it was."

Mr. Farrington had a whispered consultation with Fred at this juncture, which made the merchant very ill at ease, and caused him to testify more fully upon the point than he otherwise would have done.

"I at first thought I would keep the amount due him to make up my loss; but his manner was so hostile that I feared he would injure me in some way, so I gave him the money."

"Did he threaten you with personal violence?"

"No."

"He made no threat at all, then?"

"As I said, after thinking the matter over, I thought it would be policy to pay him," answered the witness, trying to evade the point.

"But you have not answered the question. Did he, or did he not, make any sort of a threat

which caused you to change your mind?" demanded Mr. Farrington.

"Well, yes, in a certain sense."

"In what sense?"

"He threatened to make false statements about my business."

"Would these statements have injured you?"

"They might have, for a time."

"You are sure the statements he threatened to make were false, with no foundation of truth," asked Mr. Farrington.

The witness hesitated. He saw Fred looking him square in the eye, and he shrank from answering, for he realized that the truth would probably be brought out by his former clerk.

"Yes, sir, I am sure they were false," he finally answered, while inwardly anathematizing himself at being caught in such a trap. He felt that Fred was getting the better of the case, and that, too, by his own testimony.

"In your testimony, Mr. Rexford, you said Fred Worthington impressed you at the time of his discharge with the idea that he would do you some subsequent harm. Was that impression founded upon his attitude of self defense?" asked Judge Plummer, in his slow, thoughtful way.

"No, sir, not that."

"Will you state, then, what caused you to form such an opinion?"

"Of course I could not tell his thoughts, but the deep study he seemed to be in convinced me that he was revolving in his mind some plot to be revenged on me for discharging him."

"This cannot be considered evidence," replied the judge. "His thoughts might have run upon an entirely different subject."

XX.

THE testimony so far had very little weight, and really told against the merchant more than it did against our young friend.

The track in the sawdust, however, which was measured, and which was found to be the same size as Fred's shoe and of the same general shape, was very good evidence, and being testified to by both Mr. Rexford and the sheriff, went far toward bringing our hero under suspicion of having committed the crime.

The merchant's lawyer grew eloquent over this point, but his spread eagle style failed to impress the quiet, thoughtful judge to any great extent.

The testimony for the prosecution now being all in, Fred was put upon the stand, and testified that he was at home the night of the fire, had been at home all the evening, and was in bed when the cry of fire was sounded.

"How long had you been in bed?" asked attorney Ham.

"About two hours, I think," answered Fred.

"Are you sure about that?"

"I can't say it was exactly two hours, but I

know it was not far from nine o'clock when I retired, and it was about eleven when the alarm of fire awoke me."

"Were you asleep when the alarm was started?"

"I was."

"I have no more questions at present to ask the witness," said the lawyer to the judge.

"I have one I would like to ask the witness," said Mr. Farrington, and then addressing Fred, he said:

"John Rexford testified that you threatened to make false statements about his business if he kept the money due you. Is this true?"

"I object to this question," said attorney Ham, who had learned the merchant's great desire to avoid further testimony upon this point. "It has no bearing upon this case."

"It does have a bearing upon the case, and I have a special reason for wanting an answer to my question," replied Mr. Farrington.

"The witness may answer," said the judge.

"Your honor," put in Ham, "I protest against bringing in the private business of my client, which has no relation to this case."

"This case is entirely one of circumstantial evidence," replied the judge, "and it is important that we get at the facts regarding the boy's character. The witness will answer the question."

"No, sir, it is not true."

"Did you make no threat whatever?"

"When he said he would keep my money, I told him it was a mean trick, but not much meaner than I had seen him play upon his customers."

"What reply did he make?"

"He asked me if I meant to insinuate that he cheated his customers."

"And you replied?"

"I said I did."

"What followed?"

"He threatened to have me arrested."

"And what did you say to that?"

"I replied that I would like to have him do so, for I could then tell some things about his methods that would make a stir in the village."

"This, then, is the threat you made?"

"Yes, if you call it a threat," answered Fred.

"Mr. Rexford's testimony does not agree with yours upon this point," said the judge. "Was there no statement about any special subject which Mr. Rexford considered false?"

"There was a reference to one or two matters," replied our young hero evasively.

The merchant now looked pale and wretched. His crooked business methods were about to be made known, and such a disclosure, coming right upon the loss of his store, was crushing to him.

"You will please state one of them," said the judge.

"I would prefer not to," said Fred.

"Why do you hesitate?" asked his honor.

"Because I do not wish to reveal matters about my employer's business that should be considered confidential."

"It is honorable in you to be so considerate of your former employer, and especially as he is now trying to establish a case against you. As you are only a boy, I consider it but right that I should advise you to show, if you can, that you did not threaten to make a false statement regarding his business. Such proof would aid your case and show well for your character."

Fred hesitated, thinking what he ought to do. Mr. Rexford took advantage of the pause, and asked if he would be allowed to speak a word upon this point before it was carried further. As no objection was raised by the defense, he said:

"I must acknowledge an error in my testimony regarding Fred's threat of a false statement. I was so wrought up over the matter that I hardly understood the exact language, but now I have heard his testimony it all comes back to me. His statement is essentially true."

This was an unexpected turn for matters to take. It was, however, less surprising to Fred than to the judge, and to those drawn by curiosity

to the trial. The reason for Mr. Rexford's retraction was very evident, and caused many a significant glance, and here and there an exchange of opinions upon the matter in an undertone.

Though humiliating, it was nevertheless a fortunate move for the merchant, and he was lucky to get out of his own trap so well.

Fred was looked upon at first by the villagers present as being without doubt guilty, but now they began to have some admiration for him; and as the tide turned in his favor it set against the merchant, till at length our young friend was the more popular of the two.

Fred's father and mother both corroborated his testimony upon the point of his being at home all the evening on the night of the fire, and stated that he retired to bed at about nine o'clock.

They were questioned by lawyer Ham as to whether Fred could have left the house and returned, unknown to them, between the hours of nine and eleven o'clock, when the fire was probably set.

Their testimony upon this point evidently satisfied Judge Plummer that Fred was innocent of the charge John Rexford had brought against him, for after carefully going over the testimony on both sides, he said:

"I find nothing in the evidence that would

tend to place suspicion upon Fred Worthington, who is charged with maliciously burning John Rexford's store. The testimony for the prosecution has no real weight, while that for the defense is strong, indisputable evidence, that removes all doubt as to the boy's whereabouts during the two hours when the fire must have been set, if it was set at all. I therefore discharge the accused, as no evidence has been offered that would justify me in holding him;" and then turning to our hero with a friendly smile, he added: "Fred, you can go. It is clear that you are innocent of the charge made against you."

"I thank you sincerely," said Fred, with an expression of true gratitude.

"Before you go, Fred, I wish to congratulate you upon the way you have acquitted yourself during this trial," said Judge Plummer, taking him by the hand. "Placed under fire as you have been, but few boys would have displayed the manhood you have shown."

Our young friend was profoundly moved at these kind, reassuring words, coming as they did from one who had the power to hold him for a grave crime.

Fred's parents were very happy at the outcome of the trial, and at Judge Plummer's complimentary remarks to their son, their only child.

But scarcely less gratified than they was Mr. Farrington. He not only felt pride in triumphing over the somewhat wordy lawyer Ham, but genuine satisfaction and pleasure that Fred should be cleared of all suspicion in this case.

John Rexford was defeated, dissatisfied, miserable. He had injured himself and helped his discharged clerk, who he still thought had something to do with the destruction of his store. He now quickly withdrew from the place of the trial before any one could approach him to intensify his misery by questions upon the various points of evidence.

XXI.

MATTHEW DE VERE and Tim Short had compromised matters with Jacob Simmons so that all immediate danger was passed. They were comparatively easy on this point, as a little more time had been granted them in which to pay the balance promised him; yet they did not feel entirely secure.

Fred's arrest on the charge of burning the store meant more to each of them than a mere gratification at seeing him humbled and perhaps punished. If they had been sure he would be convicted of the crime, doubtless they would have been happy indeed. The case meant so much to them that they attended the trial; and their discomfiture at the result—at seeing Fred vindicated and honorably discharged—was more than will be imagined.

They left the place of trial together, and had a long private discussion, which seemed not entirely satisfactory.

"Meet me in the pines tomorrow noon, Tim," said De Vere as he left him, wearing a worried look—almost one of fear.

Aside from these troubles, Matthew was far from happy. He had tried to learn the cause of Nellie's manner toward him the last time he saw her at school. He could not understand what had brought about the change in her.

He had not seen her for nearly a week, for she was at home sick. She took a severe cold on the night of the fire by exposure to the damp, chilly air, and had not been able to come out since. Matthew called at the doctor's to offer her his sympathy, but she would not see him. He learned from his sister, who had called every day, that Nellie was up and around the house, and from this fact he argued that she shunned him.

Fred really expected no reply to his letter to Nellie, and yet he hoped almost against hope, as it seemed to him, that she might acknowledge its receipt in some way. If only a word, and that one of criticism, he felt that it would be much more welcome than nothing.

Little did he realize how near he came to receiving the coveted letter, for it was actually written, and was one that would have given him great pleasure.

Nellie wrote the letter in the evening before the fire, and intended mailing it the next morning; but when morning came she found herself to ill to leave the house.

Two days passed; then came the report of

Fred's arrest. The news made her cheeks burn. She condemned herself for having written the letter, and while the shock was fresh upon her she destroyed it. And as it lay in the waste basket, torn into little pieces, she looked at it and felt almost sorry she had been so hasty ; even wished, though she hardly dared acknowledge it to herself, that he had the letter, guilty or not.

She took his note from her pocket and read it again ; then buried her face in her hands in deep thought.

She was interrupted by Grace Bernard, who ran in to spend a little time with her.

"Oh, isn't it good news?" she exclaimed, in her animated, girlish way.

"Isn't what good news?" asked Nellie curiously.

"Why, the result of the trial. Haven't you heard of it?"

"Has he been acquitted?" asked Nellie eagerly.

"Yes."

"No, I had not heard of the result," she replied, blushing as she realized the interest she had shown. "I only learned of the trial a few minutes ago."

"I am so glad he was proved innocent. I think it was shameful to bring such a charge against him," returned Grace.

"He has been unfortunate," replied Nellie, refraining from an expression of her own feelings.

"Yes, he has; but I do not believe any of the charges against him. Father said that Mr. Rexford was confused and embarrassed at the trial. It all came out about Fred's discharge and the missing money."

"Was it favorable to Fred?"

"Yes. Mr. Rexford had to retract his own testimony, and acknowledge that Fred was right."

"Did they learn anything about the missing money?"

"No; but father said there was no proof that Fred took it, and no good reason for thinking so. You know I told you when the report first started that I did not believe it."

"Yes, I know you did," replied Nellie, dropping her eyes, and thinking of the reference to the fact in Fred's letter to her.

"Dave told me a few days ago," continued Grace, "that Fred thought nearly all of his friends had turned against him, and that he felt terribly hurt about it. I know I have not turned against him, and I shall write and tell him so; then he will know he has one friend at least."

"He already knows it," said Nellie, in a slightly bitter tone.

"Why, how can that be, and what leads you to think so?" asked Grace, with surprise.

"I mean—probably he knows it. Dave might have told him," replied Nellie, with evident embarrassment at the fact she had unintentionally disclosed, and her inability to explain how she came by this information without making reference to Fred's letter to her.

Grace looked puzzled, and after a pause said:

"Yes, possibly he knows it, but I wish to be sure of it; and as I have no opportunity of seeing him now he is at work in the factory, I will write the letter and mail it to him. It can do no harm."

When Nellie had been left alone she could not resist referring once more to that part of Fred's letter that spoke of Grace's friendship. This, and the fact that she was intending to write him a friendly, encouraging letter, troubled Nellie. She was very glad that he had been found innocent, and that he had merited the praise of the judge, and yet she felt depressed that another should feel so happy over it. If only she had learned the news from some other source, or if Grace had shown some indifference, she would have been delighted.

Why this should trouble her she hardly knew, but that it did she was certain. She wondered if Grace would say anything about her in the letter

she would write to Fred. "I am afraid she will," Nellie said to herself. "I wish I had shown more sympathy for him, and I wanted to so much. But why should she be so happy over his triumph? The idea of her writing to him to tell him of her friendship!"

These thoughts annoyed Nellie, and she felt—yes, we may as well confess it—a little jealous of her friend Grace.

XXII.

THE next morning, as Fred was busy at his work, Carl came in from the post office, whither he had gone for the mail for several of the employees, and handed him two letters. On looking at them Fred was surprised to find both postmarked "Mapleton."

He tore one of them open nervously, hoping it might be the long looked for and much coveted answer to his own letter to Nellie Dutton. He looked at the signature—"Grace Bernard."

"What can this mean?" The thought shot through his mind, and then he proceeded to find out in a very sensible way, by reading the letter.

It was simply a friendly letter, that showed a refreshing sympathy for his misfortunes, and expressed a belief that he would in time triumph over all opposition.

The writer assured him of her belief in his innocence, and congratulated him upon his perfect vindication at the trial. She spoke of Nellie's sickness, and added that it would not be long before he would be more highly appreciated by his friends than ever.

This brief letter touched Fred deeply and brought tears of joy to his eyes. He felt so happy that he hesitated before opening the other letter, fearing it might cast a cloud over the sunshine this little note had brought him.

"And Nellie has been sick," he said to himself thoughtfully. "Perhaps this letter may be from her. I will open it and see."

It ran like this:

MAPLETON.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—Your letter, so unexpected, was a surprise to me, but I am very glad you sent it, otherwise we might not have understood each other as well as I now hope we may. It grieves me that you should feel so offended at my seeming lack of friendship. Perhaps the time may come when you will think differently. Had I received your letter two weeks ago, or had you then told me what you say you would have explained in confidence, you would probably have no cause now to complain of me.

Your letter, in some respects, is a puzzle to me. It has almost made me suspicious of a certain party, but I must wait and see what time will tell, then perhaps we shall find it agreeable to talk over the matter and be as friendly as ever. You may feel sure I was very glad of your success at the trial, and I hope, oh so much, that you will triumph over all your misfortunes. I should have answered your letter more promptly, but I have been, and still am, kept at home by a bad cold which I took the night of the fire.

With best wishes, sincerely your friend,

NELLIE DUTTON.

Instead of throwing a shadow over our young friend's horizon, this letter swept away, for a time, the few remaining clouds, and made the

sunshine so bright and cheering that he was happy indeed. He had been cast down so long by bitter misfortunes, that these expressions of friendship, and especially those of Miss Nellie, seemed to liberate his fettered spirits, and make them bound high with joy.

His work seemed nothing to him. The flockers lost their dusty, dingy appearance. The heavy rolls of cloth were but playthings in his hands. There was no friction, no irritation. Everything moved with the grace and charm of a well modeled yacht with swelling sails upon a rippling sea.

"She wishes so much that I may triumph over all my misfortunes," he said to himself, "and I can see now she almost suspects De Vere. I know she means him. I have been a fool to misjudge her so—and she is at home sick, poor girl!"

Here a sudden impulse seized him, and in a few moments he was at John Fielding's hot house and ordered a dollar's worth of choice cut flowers. He handed the florist the money and directed him to send them to Nellie Dutton with his card.

The old florist was startled—could hardly believe his own senses. Such an order to be received from a boy was unprecedented—nothing of the kind had ever been known in the village,

and that Fred Worthington, now a factory boy, should be the one to lead off in this very commendable fashion—a fashion that is only really practised in the larger towns—seemed too much to realize.

Fred saw this plainly in the queer little old man's face, and he blushed deeply as he thought what he had done.

Whether the florist hoped to encourage this sort of trade by liberal dealing I cannot say, but that he sent some very choice flowers, and a large quantity for the money, is certain. It would be difficult to imagine a more surprised or delighted person than Nellie Dutton was when she opened the box and took from it the sweet smelling flowers, and a neatly written card bearing the name—"Fred Worthington."

If she was a little jealous of her friend Grace on the previous day, she now had no occasion to feel so. Her letter had brought a response that she little expected—a response, however, that made her quite as happy as Fred.

If she had, up to this time, held serious doubts as to his innocence, they were now dispelled. A little act will many times go far toward changing one's opinion, and there are few arguments more forcible with girls, and even ladies of mature age, than are choice flowers. This act of Fred, though seemingly absurd for a boy in his

position, was a master stroke in his favor, f
not only won Nellie's friendship fully back,
it also created a very favorable impression
her mother, who was scarcely less pleased
the flowers than Nellie herself.

XXIII.

WHEN Fred had first entered the mill his attention was arrested by Jack Hickey—a witty, good natured Irishman. He was a quaint character, full of fun and humor. His employment was washing and scouring wool and shoddy —not a very genteel labor, for it was wet and dirty work, as well as tiresome. However, Jack received for such service $1.75 per day, and this made him happier than a $10,000 salary makes many a bank president.

Hickey was called by the boys the "Jolly Scourer"—not a bad appellation for him either. His tub and rinser were near the flockers. Fred could see and hear him while at his own work, and this furnished our young friend much amusement; for whenever Jack had pitched the wool about in the strong suds and was waiting for the action of steam upon it, he usually filled in the time by singing bits of original rhyme and by clog dancing.

His rhymes were as queer as himself, while his dancing was equally peculiar. He had been persistent in the practice of the latter art, no doubt;

in fact, there was decided evidence of this, for in spite of the clumsy cowhides that he wore, his right foot showed much careful training. It was full of music and always on time. It could tap the floor with the ease and skill with which a practised drummer beats the resonant diaphragm. Moreover, it seemed to know all the steps of a professional dancer, while his left foot was a thorough clod, so far as this art went.

It always seemed to go just contrary to the other, and gave the appearance of attempting something more difficult than it was capable of performing. Indeed, this was almost the invariable result, as its accomplishments in this line were so exceedingly few; besides, it was always out of time, was clumsy and awkward, and was such a foot as is familiarly described among boys as "belonging to the church."

"It is very queer why there is such a difference in the action of that man's feet," remarked Fred to himself, with a suppressed titter; "but I think, after all, the clumsy one is the most natural, and does just about as I should expect a foot to do when incased in such an amount of leather and belonging to such a man as Jack. What I don't understand is, how the other one ever became so gamy."

Fred wondered if Jack was doing all that practice simply for his own pleasure, or if he was

trying to fit himself for an engagement with some minstrel troupe. If for the latter purpose, there was some object in it; but if simply for fun, Fred could not see where it came in when he considered the immense amount of effort it must have taken to wield with such dexterity those great boots, whose legs reached far above the dancer's knee, and the soles of which were nearly an inch in thickness and contained a generous supply of iron slugs.

When Fred first witnessed Jack's comical performances, they amused him hugely, and he thought he had never before seen anything half so funny; even the annual circus, with its train of animals, and dancers, and tumblers and clowns, could not equal it. The "Jolly Scourer" was extremely comical and clownish, evidently without trying to be so, while the circus clown's *effort* at comical acts and sayings detracts from the amusing effect of the acts themselves.

Jack was thoroughly original, and his originality in music, which accompanied these performances, added much to them; for, contrary to the custom of many small boys when practising clog dancing, instead of whistling Jack furnished his music by singing, in a rich brogue, bits of improvised rhyme that he seemed to compose for the occasion. Many of them were very funny, and possessed the originality and wit character-

istic of his nationality, which added much to the whole performance.

Fred soon made the acquaintance of the "Jolly Scourer," and had many good laughs at his jokes, which often lightened the monotony of routine work. He moreover did our young hero many acts of kindness, and in a certain matter proved of great service to him.

Time passed by with Fred in his factory life not altogether unpleasantly, and as he saw no chance of getting into a store again very soon, he concluded that the best thing for him to do was to gain every point possible relative to woolen manufacture, and especially to the finishing department, in which he had commenced his mill career.

Consequently he bent his energies to this purpose. Whatever was to be learned by observation and by questioning he was fast finding out. When he first ventured out into the wet gig room, he saw there numerous machines, the working of which was a curiosity which he wished to have explained; and after carefully examining them he hastened back to the little humpback, where he felt confident he could get the desired information. Said he:

"Carl, what are those great tall machines in the second room beyond us, that have the large cylinders?"

"They are gigs—wet gigs."

"And what are they for?"

"They are to raise a nap on the cloth."

"How do they do that?"

"Well, that cylinder is covered with handles. You know what handles are, I s'pose?"

"I know something about some kind of handles, but I guess not of this kind."

"They are long iron frames about seven feet long, half an inch thick, and just wide enough to take in two teasels, one on top of the other so as to make two rows of them the whole length of the handle."

"And this iron frame filled with teasels is called a 'handle'?"

"Yes."

"But what are teasels?"

"They are the burrs of a plant something like a thistle. They are about the size of a small egg, only not quite so large around, and they do not taper so much, though one end is a little larger than the other. They have sharp points, sort of like hooks, which all turn down toward the stem, so you can run your hand over them one way and the points won't hurt; but if you pull your hand back they dig right to the flesh."

"Oh, I know now, I saw a lot of them up stairs the other day and wondered for what they were

used here. Seems to me they are queer things to use on cloth. Wouldn't something like a card with iron tacks be better, and last longer?"

"No, I guess not. Probably anything like that would tear the cloth, and I believe all of the mills use teasels. You see they would use what is best."

"Yes, I suppose so," added Fred thoughtfully; "but tell me about the gig and how they use this little prickly thing."

"Well, as I said, these frames filled with teasels are called handles, and as the gig cylinders are covered all over with handles, it makes kind of a solid bed of teasels. The cylinder whirls one way, and the cloth, which is drawn close against it, goes the other."

"I should think the sharp points would dig into the cloth, and tear it the same as wire points would."

"You see the gig is going so fast they don't get hold much, and then they are not strong enough to tear it at once, but will wear it out rather fast if too much pressure is put upon it. Those gigs out there don't hurt it much, though, for they use old handles and the teasels are broken down a good deal."

"Where are they used first, if they are old?"

"Up stairs on the dry gigs."

"What! Is it gigged up there, too?"

"Oh, yes; on two different gigs. Haven't you seen the great square iron framed machines with two cylinders and two men tending them?"

"No, I think not. I don't believe I have been into that room yet."

"Well, the cloth is gigged there on the big machines the first thing after it leaves the fulling mills and washers."

"How long do they run it up there?"

"They run it quite a while in all the different processes it goes through. After it is gigged the first time then it is cropped."

"Cropped, you say?" exclaimed Fred, laughing. "Well, you have me again, for I am sure I don't know what that means."

"Why, it means sheared—cutting off the nap which the teasels dig up—only they don't call it 'sheared' the first two times."

"How many times is it sheared, I wonder!"

"'Bout four or five times, I think; twice on the cropper, and twice or three times on the finishing shears. As I said before, it is run on the big gig first and then is cropped. After this process is completed, it runs on another dry gig of the same shape as the wet ones, and is cropped again. Then it is placed on to the wet gigs where you saw it."

"I should think it would be all worn out if it is run so long against those sharp teasels, be-

sides having the nap sheared off several times. How long do they keep it on the gigs?"

"It does get spoiled sometimes; I have seen plenty of pieces with the face of the cloth all gigged through. It tears the filling all out and leaves the warp. The cloth runs on each gig till a good nap is worked up."

"That would be a good many hours in all, I suppose, but I don't see the use of gigging it so much as to spoil the cloth. It won't wear very well, will it?"

"Yes, but they gig it so as to get an extra fine finish, and make it smooth and handsome. And then there are what they call the steam gigs. It is run on them, and besides this it is gigged several times on the back, both on dry and wet gigs."

"What! Is there still another kind of gig?" asked Fred, beginning to get incredulous.

"No, they are just the same as the ones you saw, only they run the cloth through them after it is steamed, so the boys call them the 'steam gigs.'"

XXIV.

"ARE the steam gigs wet ones, too?" asked Fred.

"Yes, and they use the oldest handles of any, because this is the last time the cloth is gigged, and it won't stand much scraping. After it leaves these gigs it goes to the drier, and then goes back up stairs."

"When it goes back up there, I suppose it goes through a dozen or two more processes, does it not?"

"Well, it goes through quite a number. I believe it is sheared the first thing, and then it has to be brushed and sheared again."

"What kind of a thing is a shear, any way, such as is used for shearing the nap from cloth? I can't imagine how it works, though I have often wished to see it in operation."

"I don't believe I can tell you so you will understand it. You had better go up and see for yourself."

"You can give me an idea about it. I don't want to go up there now without showing some better reason than curiosity. Mr. Farrington

might think it queer, and get an idea that I am neglecting my work, as he said Tim Short did."

"All right, then; I'll tell you the best I can. I used to think myself, when I heard father talking about the shears, that they must be something like mother's shears, only with great long blades; but I found I was mistaken. The shears up stairs are about seven feet long; you see they have to be as long as the cloth is wide. They have iron frames, and I guess are five feet high. There is a roller on the back side and another on the front. On the top and front of the machine is a steel plate which runs the whole length of the shear. This plate has a square edge, and the cloth passes over it from one roller to the other. It is drawn tight when it goes over the steel plate, and there is what I believe they call a cylinder that has sharp knives upon it. They call them knives, but they are like strips of sharp steel fastened on to the cylinder. They are 'bout half an inch high, and run the whole length of the cylinder in a spiral way, just the same as I would wind a string round this stick from bottom to top, if every time the string went round it was an inch from where it went round before.

"Well, you see—these strips of steel go round like that, only they are a good deal straighter and are 'bout two inches apart. They call these strips

the knives and grind them just like any other shears. The way they do this is by running the cylinder the wrong way and holding a piece of stone against them. This gives them a sharp edge. This cylinder is let down so close to the steel plate that there isn't room for the cloth to pass between it and the cylinder without having the face or nap sheared off by the sharp knives of the cylinder that is going round like lightning. That's 'bout all there is to it. Do you get any idea how it works?"

"Oh, yes; I think I see how it is. As the cloth passes over the plate one way, the cylinder whirls the other and clips off the nap. I understand now why a knot in the back of the cloth would do so much harm. As it passes over the plate 'twould raise the cloth up so as to cut a hole in the face of it; but when you told me about it the other day I thought a little thing like that didn't amount to much."

"Yes, that's right," responded Carl, with a pleased look on finding his explanation had proved successful. "I have told you a little about nearly all the processes of finishing cloth. I may as well tell the rest. Oh, I forgot to tell you how the cloth is brushed. Well, it is done by machinery. The brush itself is a roller about six inches through, and the same length as the shear cylinder. The bristles are put into the

roller all over it, so it is just like any brush, only round. The cloth runs on the brushing machine about the same as on the shear, and the brush that is let down on to the cloth revolves with an awful speed—so fast that it appears to be like a smooth piece of iron or wood. I tell you it takes the dust out and straightens out the nap in good shape."

"I should think it would," said Fred; and then added, in a humorous vein, "I would like to run my clothes through a machine like that; and I don't know but myself too, after working all day in this stifling dust. I wonder if it would clean our jackets? I rather think they would have to run through more than once to remove so many flocks."

"Oh! there is a brush up where the handles are brushed that is just the thing for our jackets. I have brushed mine there a good many times."

"Where the handles are brushed? Why, what is the object in brushing them?"

"The teasels fill all up with the nap that they dig out of the cloth, so they are only run a little while at a time before they are changed and clean ones put into the gigs. Then those that are taken off are brushed so that the nap almost all comes off and leaves the handles clean again. Didn't you notice that light stuff that we put into the wet grinder? Well, that is what comes

off from the handles. It is made into flocks, pieces of teasels and all."

"Yes, I have seen it, and meant to ask you before where it came from. I suppose that is where the profit is made, in allowing as little to waste as possible. Well, go on with the finishing business."

"There isn't much more to be told about it. The cloth goes from the brush to presses where it is pressed with steam and by machinery of some kind that is awful powerful. The cloth is folded first into single width, and then it is folded the other way, so that it is about a yard square. A piece of stiff, smooth paper is placed between each fold. The cloth stays in the press quite a long time, and when it is taken out it is ready to be shipped to New York or wherever it is to go."

Fred expressed his gratitude to Carl for furnishing him so much information, and felt that, having gained considerable theoretical idea of finishing cloth, he could the more rapidly accumulate such knowledge as might be of valuable service to him.

Fred received a charming little note from Nellie, thanking him over and over again for the sweet flowers he had sent her. "Such a delightful surprise," she said, "and to think you should be so thoughtful of me and so very, very kind when you think I deserted you in your

trouble. I cannot understand you under these circumstances, but I hope some time you will tell me your motive in returning good for evil, as I know you feel you have done."

The note made him rather happy at first, but as he studied it more carefully it somewhat chilled him.

"'Some time' she hopes I may tell her my motive, not very soon; the 'some time' sounds a good away off," he mused. "I wonder why this is! Perhaps she wants to wait and see if I am innocent of all that still seems against me before she will invite me to call, or even meet me."

This seemed so probable to him that he felt like punishing himself for having acted so impulsively.

In the mean time Matthew, among others, learned of Fred's sending the flowers, and heard that Nellie was much pleased at receiving them. This galled him severely, especially as she had refused to see him when he called. With all he had done to injure Fred, and with all of his efforts to please her, he feared that his rival was still more of a favorite with her than himself, though the former was now but a factory boy.

He felt exceedingly bitter and tempted to play even a bolder game than he had thus far done.

"But what can it be?" he said to himself. "I have already tried to waylay him, and

failed. I got the bartender to drug him and make him drunk, thinking that would keep him down. But no! He was discharged on this account, and I thought he was disgraced, but still he was not put down. I even——" but here he shrank from repeating even to himself this terrible act, and buried his face in his hands in deep thought—defeated, dejected, and miserable.

XXV.

FOR a time everything at the factory ran well, and Fred turned off his work quite as satisfactorily as could have been expected, since he was a new hand and unaccustomed to the duties. He learned them readily, however, but not soon enough to escape the fault finding of Christopher Hanks, who seemed to delight in making it uncomfortable for the boys, as he was one of those disagreeable and contemptible men who take delight in tyrannizing over those below them in authority, especially if they are boys, and consequently not able to match them in strength and courage.

It is just possible, however, that Christopher overestimated his own powers in this latter respect, or still more probable that he had a decidedly faulty conception of our young friend's muscular development, as may hereafter be shown.

Fred had the good sense, however, to keep from having any trouble with him on first going into the mill, as he was already under a cloud, and he knew that it would be for his advantage

to submit for a time to what was anything but agreeable to one of his spirit. "A fuss with Hanks at this time," thought he, "might turn Mr. Farrington against me, and then I should have no strong friend left."

Fred looked upon Mr. Farrington as one who would do everything possible to help him advance and aid him in re-establishing his innocence. It may as well be said here that this latter consideration was more to him than anything else, for he felt most keenly the attitude of many of his former friends whenever he chanced to meet them. Moreover, he hoped to be promoted as soon as a vacancy should occur, provided he conducted himself so as to merit it.

For these several reasons Fred put up with the mean treatment of Hanks, that he might become well established before asserting his manliness and independence.

He did the heavy work that really belonged to Hanks, so that Carl might escape it. He did even more than had been done by either boy before he came, for the carrying of the cloth had been imposed upon him. Fred did not know this for some time, until Jack Hickey, the "Jolly Scourer," said to him one day:

"Me b'y, why do ye let that ould spalpane crowd ye so?"

"Why, what do you mean?" inquired young

Worthington, who wanted to draw out his friend of the Emerald Isle.

"I mane about luggin' the cloth. Sure, an' no b'y but ye has ever done it."

"I thought it was a part of my work; he told me to do it the first morning I came in, and no one ever spoke to me about it before."

"Oh, by St. Patrick, he'd loaf on ye if he could—the old sour mouth."

This opened Fred's eyes still further, and when he saw Carl he said to him:

"Why didn't you tell me that it wasn't my work to lug the cloth down?"

"Because Mr. Hanks told me that he was going to make you do it, and threatened me if I told you; and I didn't want to do anything to displease him."

"Well, it is all right; I am glad you didn't do anything to make him treat you worse, but there may be a time ahead for a reckoning between him and me. I know of other tricks of his, and I'll make good use of my information when the time comes."

"I hope you won't have a fuss with him and leave the flockers. My work is so much easier now," replied Carl anxiously.

"Oh, no; I guess I won't leave them right away," returned Fred. "I am glad if you are getting along better than you did before I came."

"Oh, yes, I am; and my back isn't so lame now I don't lift any; but I don't seem to get strong. It seems as if I couldn't do the heavy work any more if I tried."

"I am indeed sorry," said Fred sympathetically, "but I hope you don't get so tired as you did. If you do not, and think you are strong enough, I would like to have you come up to my house evenings and study with me. I think you spoke as if you would like a better education. I thought that night, after we were talking about it, that I would ask you to do this, and I have been waiting for you to get stronger; but you have looked so tired all the time that I kept putting off speaking about it till now."

As the little cripple thought of the previous kind acts of Fred, and listened to his new proposal to teach him, his eyes grew moist with gratitude, and a crystal drop stole down his thin, pale cheek. He said nothing for a moment or two, but that silent tear meant more to our young friend than words could have expressed. It seemed to him that at no time in his life had his own heart been so large and his sympathy for others so great.

Presently Carl replied:

"Oh, I should be so glad of such a chance, but I am afraid it would trouble you too much."

"No, that's nothing. It would do me good

to review my studies, and, moreover, I should find a pleasure in feeling that I was really doing you a good turn."

"Then I will try it, and I hope I can hold out, for if I could only get an education I think I could find some lighter work to do that would be better for me. I don't feel very strong now, but I hope I can stand it. When shall I commence?"

"You may come any evening."

"You are at home every night, are you?"

"Yes, every evening except Sunday—then I go to church."

"I should think you would go out with the boys and have some fun."

"I can't do that and study too."

"Do you study now? I thought you were a good scholar."

"Yes; I have not missed an evening since I came into the mill."

"What are you studying?"

"I am studying mathematics and practising penmanship most of the time. They will be most useful to me if ever I get into business."

"I am afraid it would be too much trouble, then, for you to teach me."

"Oh, don't worry about that. I have plenty of books, too, that you can use, so you need not buy any," said Fred, wishing to encourage his

friend as much as possible, though he well knew that his offer would be no little inconvenience to himself.

In the course of a few evenings Carl asked his uncle, after they had finished supper, if he could go over to Mr. Worthington's for a little while; and after receiving a favorable answer he went up stairs and put on another suit. It was the best the poor boy had, though the coat fitted him badly, owing to his deformity. All the garments, moreover, were made from inexpensive material, and had been in service so long that they showed much wear.

Those of my readers who know nothing of poverty, or even want, would doubtless consider a suit of this kind almost unfit for gunning or fishing; but as it was the only dress suit which Carl had, he kept it neat and clean. He put on a white collar, a well worn blue necktie, and thus attired was soon on his way to his friend's house.

XXVI.

FRED found, much to his surprise, that Carl was something of a scholar, as he could read well and write a very fair hand. He had thoroughly mastered an elementary arithmetic, learning all of the tables and rules so as to apply them readily and correctly.

"When did you learn so much about mathematics?" asked Fred. "You have had no teacher."

"Well, I got a little idea of it before going into the mill, enough so that I managed to work my way through the book after getting around again from my sickness. Since then I have been through the book so many times that I know it almost by heart."

"Why didn't you get a more advanced book, instead of spending so much time on this one?"

"That is just what I wanted, but couldn't buy one."

"Almost any one would have given or lent you one, the same as I am going to let you use my books. It is too bad that you have been kept back for the want of suitable books; but what

you have been over you have learned so thoroughly that it is worth about as much to you as if you had been through several higher arithmetics, and knew none of them well. Have you ever studied geography?"

"No, I have not, and that is just the book I want to study most, for I would like to know something about the world. Have you a geography?"

"Yes, I have two that I am done using. It is an interesting study. I used to like to draw maps." And opening his desk—which, by the way, Fred had made himself—he took out a large number of well executed maps, and showed them to Carl, in whose eyes shone a gleam of admiration as he looked them over, and said, almost incredulously:

"You didn't make them, did you? And with a pen, too? Why! they look like boughten ones"

"Yes, I made them all with a pen and different kinds of ink; that shading is all pen work, too. It is easy enough after one gets the hang of it. The greatest trouble is to get just the right shape to the maps, and to have everything in the right proportion."

"I should think that would be hard enough, but these letters are what stick me. They are exactly like print."

"Oh, they are easy; I learned to print a long time ago. It is much easier than good penmanship, for it is slow, while writing is done much faster, so it takes a lot of practice to get the knack of it; but I like it and can do pretty good work now. Here are some of my cards and a little flourishing work, and this is what I am doing now"—showing Carl a set of books on which he had been at work in his bookkeeping.

Again the little cripple was greatly interested to see the handsome work before him—for handsome it was, as Fred, by dint of much practice, had become a superior penman.

"I never saw such good writing," said Carl; "only what our writing master used to do, when I went to school, and he didn't do any of these birds either. Where did you learn to do it?"

"I learned it right here. You or anybody could do it by practising enough."

"I wish I had known that before, then I could have practised when I had no books to study; but I thought nobody could learn to write much without a teacher."

"You were mistaken there; a good copy and plenty of the right sort of practice will make any one a good penman. But what would you like to study most? Tell me what you want to fit yourself for, then I will tell you what I think will do you the most good."

"I would like to get so I could keep books. There is a place in the finishing room where an account of the cloth and shipping is kept. It is easy work, and pays well. I thought, perhaps, if I could only do the work, I might some time get that job, or some good place outside of the mill."

"Yes, that would, perhaps, be the best thing for you; so I should think you had better practise penmanship, bookkeeping, and spelling. You know about enough of mathematics already for keeping ordinary accounts. The bookkeeping won't amount to very much to you in itself, but while you are at work at that you will be gaining in the other two, and will get used to the forms. You wanted to study geography, but you had better let that go till you get fitted for a better position; then you can take it up at leisure."

Fred now procured pen and paper for Carl, and set about instructing him in penmanship. The little cripple was so much pleased with his kind treatment that his gratitude was plainly expressed in his face, and he commenced his task with all a boy's enthusiasm. As he carefully copied the letters before him, his mind doubtless looked forward to the time when he would rise above his present position in life and approach nearer to the goal of his ambition.

The next morning Carl did not put in an appearance at the regular hour. Time went by

and still he did not come. This left Christopher Hanks' force one hand short, and obliged him to do a good amount of work himself to enable him and Fred to keep all the machines running.

He was quite out of sorts this morning, and Carl's absence, together with the extra work, made him irritable, cross, and overbearing. Fred endured this disagreeable mood for a while, but at last it grew intolerable to him, so when Hanks ordered him in an insolent tone to bring down more cloth he refused point blank.

Hanks fell into a rage and acted as if he would like to smash things generally, and Fred in particular, but he very sensibly kept a good distance from the latter, who had little regard for such a scraggy, ill tempered individual.

"So you refuse to do yer work?" demanded Hanks excitedly.

"No, sir, I do not," replied Fred firmly.

"Then will you bring them bundles down?"

"No, sir."

"That's your work," said Hanks, cooling down at Fred's determined tone and manner.

"That is not my work, though you have imposed it upon me since I have been here."

"I'm boss of this here job, and what I tell yer to do is fur yer to 'tend to. Ef yer don't mind me I'll have yer discharged," said Hanks, trying to intimidate our young friend.

"I would like to see you have me discharged for not doing your work," said Fred defiantly. "I have found out all about this business, and just what I am supposed to do."

Hanks saw that he was foiled, that Fred had the advantage of him, and that he had better let the matter drop as easily as possible, or he might find himself in trouble if Fred should take it to Mr. Farrington. It suddenly occurred to him that he was needed up in the other room, and he withdrew hastily. As he turned to go he noted the evident pleasure pictured on Jack Hickey's face at his own discomfiture and Fred's triumph.

"Good, me b'y!" said the jolly Irishman to our young friend. "I told ye not to stand the old spalpane's thricks."

"I don't mean to any longer," replied Fred.

"Ye has a dale of sparit, for sure. I knowed it all the time, but bedad and I thought it wad never start."

"Now it has started I'll keep it up so far as Hanks is concerned," replied our hero, as he took a basket under his arm and started for a supply of flocks.

Hanks managed to avoid him the remainder of the forenoon. No further crash therefore occurred between them during that time. That the scraggy old man was thoroughly angry there was no doubt—angry at Fred's triumph over

him, and most angry at poor little Carl for remaining away, and as Hanks believed, for telling what he had forbidden him to disclose to Fred.

About three o'clock in the afternoon Carl came in, pale and sick, but much better than in the morning, when despite all his efforts he could not summon strength enough to go to his work. Fred was in the drying room at the time, and Hanks was up after a roll of cloth. He had just brought down two, and was struggling to get an exceedingly large roll upon his shoulder. This he succeeded in doing after one or two failures, that caused the hands standing near to laugh at him, and make irritating remarks, as is their custom on such occasions.

All this had its maddening effect upon him, and it so happened that one of the employees had just taken up the stairs a bucket filled with soft soap, and had accidently spilled some on the three top stairs. Hanks now came along with the roll of cloth, twice his own size, upon his shoulder—an awkward load to handle — and started to descend. He slipped on the first step, and in trying to regain his footing tripped himself, and tumbled, bumped, and rolled all the way to the bottom of the stairs.

The cloth kept along with him. At one time he was on the top of the roll, and at another it seemed to have the better of him. At any rate

they stuck by each other, and landed well out on the floor side by side.

Jack Hickey indulged in a characteristic shout. All the employees in the room gathered around and laughed in a manner that must have been very tantalizing to one in Hanks' plight.

Just then Fred came in and joined the crowd. The old man saw him, and fire almost flashed from his eyes. His two front teeth, that so annoyed our hero by hanging loose and waving back and forth, now seemed to shake as if worked by an electric motor.

He picked himself up, white with rage, and parting company with his roll of cloth, rushed into his corner beneath the stairs beside the flockers.

The first object that caught his eye was Carl. Hanks rushed at him like a madman, and catching him around the throat, pushed him roughly against a hard iron frame and demanded to know why he dared to disobey his orders in telling what he had been forbidden to mention.

The little cripple cried out with fear and pain, injured as he was by Hanks' revengeful act. Fred had now made his way to the flockers, and the half stifled cry was the first intimation he had had of Carl's presence. He rushed at once to his assistance, and grappled with the boy's assailant.

A fierce struggle now ensued. Hanks' blood was up. He was almost like a wild man, and his strength was nearly doubled. At first our young friend was hardly a match for the maddened man. They rolled and tumbled, first one seeming to gain the supremacy and then the other.

The old man struggled desperately to win the contest. He struck Fred a telling blow on the nose that made the blood flow copiously and added horror to the scene. But this did not weaken our hero's courage. It rather strengthened his determination and purpose. The fire flashed from his eyes; all the force of his well trained physique was at his command, and with a powerful effort he hurled his antagonist to the floor and fell upon him.

Still the struggle went on, but soon Hanks' strength began to fail him, and when he felt himself overpowered by Fred's superior skill and strength he begged for mercy.

But he did not need to do this, as Fred would certainly much sooner have been severely punished himself than have struck his antagonist while down, however much contempt he might feel for him.

Jack Hickey and a few others now gathered around and interfered in the interest of peace. They saw that Fred had won the fight and was

master of the situation. Each contestant was covered with blood, and presented a pitiable sight.

Just then Mr. Farrington happened to be passing through the room on his round of inspection, and attracted by those gathered at the flockers he hurried there also, to learn the cause of the excitement.

XXVII.

THE overseer was amazed—could hardly believe his own eyes, when he saw the strange spectacle before him.

"What does this mean?" he asked sharply.

"I have been assaulted—brutally assaulted," whined Hanks.

"And you assaulted him?" he said sternly, turning to Fred.

"I have done nothing without good cause," replied Fred.

"See, he don't deny it," put in Hanks.

"No, I don't deny it, if defending a little cripple against your abuse and cruel treatment is an assault," answered our hero in a way that carried conviction to the overseer.

"Abuse and cruel treatment!" repeated Mr. Farrington.

"Yes; here is Carl. He can tell the story," replied our young friend.

"Why, my boy, are you sick? What makes you look so pale?" asked Mr. Farrington, with feeling, as Carl stepped toward him, hardly able to stand.

"I do feel a little faint," he said, catching hold of Fred's hand for support.

"Have you been injured by that man?" asked the kind hearted overseer, pointing with scorn at Hanks.

"Oh, I don't know why he did it. I didn't disobey him," replied the little cripple, with tears in his eyes.

The tone of his voice, his tears, and whole manner touched Mr. Farrington deeply.

"What did he do to you?" he asked.

Carl told the story in substance as I have already given it.

"I regret seriously that anything of this kind should have happened," said Mr. Farrington to our hero, "but I admire the spirit and bravery you have shown in defending this poor boy;" and turning to Hanks he gave him a withering rebuke, and discharged him on the spot. "Come to my desk," continued the indignant overseer, "and get a bill of your time, and never show your head in my department again."

Hanks saw that further argument would be of no use to him. He consequently gathered up his effects with as much celerity as possible, and after washing the blood stains from his face and hands, and casting upon Fred a parting glance of hatred and revenge, he left the room amid the jeers and taunts of all the workmen.

Fred found himself the hero of the hour. The news spread through the mill with almost incredible rapidity. His defense of the poor cripple touched the hearts of the operatives.

Carl's uncle told the story of Fred's kindness to his nephew, as well as his offer to teach him. Everybody in the mill talked the matter over, and perhaps magnified to some extent Fred's bravery and noble hearted conduct.

A little incident often turns the tide of popular opinion. This act turned it most effectually in Fred's favor, and he was now lionized by all the factory people.

The report was not long in finding its way throughout the village. Our young friend's name was in the mouth of almost every one. He was discussed and rediscussed as one only can be in a small village, where little happens of general interest to form a theme of conversation. With few exceptions, the verdict of popular opinion was flattering to him. The manner of almost every one changed toward him as if by magic.

Those people who had but a few days before cast suspicious, knowing glances at him, as if to say, "I know your record," were now most cordial and painstaking to try and impress him with a sense of their friendship and their admiration for his bravery and manly conduct.

Fred now thought that he could see his way back to his old position among his friends, and the hope made him happy.

He wondered what Nellie thought of him now, and whether his act that had won the praise of so many had placed him in a better light before her eyes. How much he wanted to see her and receive her praise! A single word from her would have been more highly prized than the most flattering compliments of twenty others.

Shortly after Mr. Farrington returned to his desk from the scene at the flockers, Jacob Simmons entered the factory and approached him.

"Can you give me a job?" said he meekly. "I have finished my fall work, and would like to get in here during the cold weather."

"Yes, I want a man at once."

"I'm your man, then," returned Jacob hopefully.

"Can you commence work now? I have just discharged a man, and must put some one in his place, or the work will fall behind."

"Sho! How fortunate!"

"Fortunate for you, you mean?"

"That's it; that's it exactly."

"But you have not answered my question. Can you commence work at once?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you may have the position."

Jacob looked happy.

"You may come with me," continued Mr. Farrington, as he led the way through the long hall and down the stairs to the flockers. "I have a bright boy who will teach you the duties of the position."

"That will help out, but I shan't be long in learning," replied Jacob.

They had now reached the flockers.

"Here is your assistant," said Mr. Farrington, as Fred came up from behind one of the machines. "I presume you know each other well."

Jacob took a step back involuntarily, and the color seemed to leave his face, as if terrified at our hero's sudden and unexpected appearance before him.

"Why, don't you know him?" asked the overseer, observing Mr. Simmons hesitate.

"Oh, I see now, it is Fred Worthington," replied Jacob, regaining his self possession.

"Yes, and you will find him a valuable assistant. Fred, I wish you to teach Mr. Simmons the duties of his position. I will come down again before the closing hour," he continued, as he turned to go up stairs, "and see how you get along with the work."

XXVIII.

LITTLE Carl was fairly prostrated by the shock received from Hanks' abusive treatment.

Mr. Farrington, noticing this, very kindly sent for his carriage, and had him taken to his uncle's house. After learning from Fred something of the boy's circumstances, and more fully of Hanks' cruelty to him, he dispatched a messenger to Dr. Dutton, requesting him to call and examine Carl, and administer such treatment as the case required.

The doctor found him very nervous, and so weak that he seemed almost exhausted. His aunt explained that he had been growing weaker for some time past, and that his extra exertion the previous night in going to Fred's house and studying was too much for him. The physician gave him a mild sedative to quiet his nerves, and then left him for the night.

The next day he called again, and found the boy feverish and complaining that his back was sensitive and painful.

"I am afraid he will have a fever," said Dr.

Dutton to Mr. Farrington, when he called later in the day to learn of the boy's condition.

"I hope not, doctor," returned the latter; "but give him your best treatment. I have a great deal of sympathy for him now I know the sad story of his life."

"I shall certainly give him careful attention," answered the doctor, "but he has little strength to build on. Has his work been hard?"

"Not since Fred Worthington has been in the mill with him. Fred, I am informed, did much of the boy's work to help him along."

"I have heard a good deal of praise bestowed upon Fred for defending the little fellow from abuse," remarked the doctor.

"And it is justly due him, too. He is a brave and manly fellow—is Fred."

"I am glad to hear you speak well of him; but I thought he was a ruined boy, and guilty of several damaging charges."

"They are all groundless, I believe," replied Mr. Farrington earnestly; "and I am surprised to find that you fall in with the general opinion without inquiring as to his guilt or innocence."

"There isn't a chance for much doubt about that drunken affair, as he came to my house thoroughly intoxicated, and I took care of him for a time and then carried him home. Did you know of that?"

"Yes; I knew of it some time ago; but do you know how he came to go to your house? That's the point to get at!"

"No, I do not. It has been a mystery to me ever since, but I never felt like asking him about it."

"You would, perhaps, be surprised to know who was the means of getting him drunk, and that the same fellow led him in that state to your door, purposely to disgrace him."

"You astonish me, Mr. Farrington. But tell me about it; perhaps I have judged the boy hastily. Who was the culprit?"

"I will tell you, with the understanding that you shall not repeat it, for it's Fred's wish that it shall not become known until the young scoundrel shows his own guilt by telling it."

"I promise to say nothing to any one."

"The culprit was Matthew De Vere."

"Who? Matthew De Vere! Impossible!"

"No, not impossible at all. Indeed, I haven't the slightest doubt of it. I have the story straight, and know from Dave all the circumstances that led to the result."

It is not strange that the doctor was surprised and annoyed at this unexpected revelation, and it had more than ordinary significance to him, also, for this reason: he was fully aware of Matthew's decided preference for the society of his

daughter Nellie. Of course, it was but a boyish fancy at most; but what might not grow out of it? Did he not, in fact, during his own school-days, form an attachment for one who afterwards became his wife?

In view of this, was it not rather a source of secret satisfaction to look ahead to the possibility of his daughter's future? Matthew's father was the most wealthy man in town, and president of the bank in which the doctor held a large amount of stock. Matthew would probably succeed his father in a few years, and would not only be very rich, but would be connected with a very desirable business—that of banking.

Dr. Dutton, like almost every other man, would have been proud to have his daughter become the wife of a wealthy and promising young man, and, so far as he knew, Matthew bade fair to become such. To be sure, people said he was a little wild, but that would wear away.

"He, of course, like many other boys, had to sow a few wild oats," said the doctor to himself, when he had been thinking of the subject, "but he will come out all right."

Herein the doctor erred in his judgment, for the sowing of "wild oats," so called, is never safe; and it has been the dangerous license granted to thousands and thousands of boys which has caused their ruin.

Whatever a boy practises becomes after a time a habit; and the rooting up of such a habit is a matter that requires no little attention and force of will. The average person finds himself unable to grapple successfully with what has at last become a second nature, thus proving beyond peradventure that it is never safe to tamper with anything that is evil.

I would not wish to give the impression that Dr. Dutton knew how corrupt Matthew was. He simply overlooked the boy's evil tendency; but when he came to listen to Mr. Farrington's story, which went into the details and related in full all that occurred in the barroom, and then described the contemptibly mean trick of enticing Fred to his house with the promise of entering with him, it put quite another face on the matter. Moreover, it raised Fred to a height in the doctor's estimation which contrasted strongly with the depth to which Matthew sank.

XXIX.

JACOB SIMMONS had received his first lesson at his new employment. Fred's ready way of imparting instruction did much to facilitate his progress. After the cloth had been placed on the machine and everything fixed for a long run, Fred left him to watch it and keep it in its proper place, while he went up to the other room to give attention to that portion of the business.

Once alone he had a chance to think, unhindered by the presence of any one.

"What does it all mean?" he said to himself. "Mr. Simmons actually turned pale when he saw me—seemed stunned for a minute. Yes, he even stepped back as if he were afraid of me. There must be some cause for this," he meditated, "and I do wonder what it is."

The idea clung to him. The more he thought upon it and studied the man, the more he became impressed that something was wrong—that Mr. Simmons for some reason dreaded meeting him. What this cause could be was the question to be solved.

Not many days after Jacob commenced work in the factory, Fred made a discovery that at once aroused his suspicions and turned his thoughts in quite another direction, for previously he had believed that Jacob's aversion to him was due to some personal matter; but now he had a clue that led to a different belief, and one that might clear up a great mystery which had not long since thrown its shadow over himself.

"Do you know Mr. Simmons yet?" asked Fred of Jack Hickey.

"Well, I spakes to him now an' thin. But why do ye ask, me b'y?"

"I want you to do me a favor."

"Sure an' I will do that inny time for ye."

"Thank you, Jack. I want you to borrow Mr. Simmons' knife and manage to keep it till I can see it, but don't breathe a word of this to him or any one."

Jack promised secrecy, and went about making friends with Mr. Simmons. In due time he secured the knife, and when Jacob was out of the room, called Fred to him and handed him the desired article.

Our hero's face lighted up triumphantly as he took it and examined it closely.

"The very one," he exclaimed. "I knew it the minute I saw it in his hands," referring to Mr. Simmons.

"Is ye crazy?" asked Jack. "By St. Patrick, ye act as if ye had found an ould friend."

"Yes—or—I mean it is just the knife I want," answered Fred, coloring and trying to show less concern. "I wish you would buy it for me. I will pay whatever he asks, but don't let him know I want it."

"And what fer, me b'y, do ye want it so much?"

"I cannot tell you just yet."

"And why not?"

"You shall know all about it after a while, but I must say nothing now."

"Some myshtery about it, I'd sthake my reputashen."

"Well, I surely cannot prevent your guessing about it, Jack. But don't fail to obtain it for me."

"Sure and ye shall have it if he will take a dacent price for it."

"Don't stand on the price," said Fred, whose anxiety to procure it was most manifest.

Jack was impressed by Fred's manner that the knife was wanted for some important evidence, and he argued that something must be wrong or Fred would go to Mr. Simmons himself and buy the knife if he wanted it simply for pocket use.

His curiosity was aroused, and his ingenuity was taxed to know how to get the knife with-

out arousing Jacob's suspicion if there really was any secret attached to it.

He reasoned that possession was a strong point in his favor. He had it now, and finally decided to keep it if he could once get it home. He thought he could easily make some excuse to gain time. He had taken a great liking to Fred, and was willing to strain a point of propriety to serve him, and as there was a mystery surrounding the knife he felt impelled by his own curiosity to hold fast to it for the present.

As good luck would have it Jacob did not miss the knife before the closing hour that night. This enabled Jack to take it home with him, where he put it under lock and key.

The next day he apologized to Mr. Simmons for leaving it at home, spoke of its being a superior knife, and finally touched upon the subject of buying it.

After much parleying he succeeded in effecting a trade, but had to pay down a handsome price. Jacob evidently felt some apprehension about letting it go, but four dollars looked so large to him that he could not let the offer pass unaccepted, especially as he thought he was getting the best of the bargain.

Jack informed Fred of his success. The latter was much pleased, and after thanking him for the favor, said :

"Now, Jack, I want you to examine the knife carefully before handing it to me. I want to be able to prove how it came into my possession. You may be called upon to testify that you bought it from Mr. Simmons, so you must be able to identify it positively."

XXX.

DR. DUTTON was a wealthy man and often loaned money to his neighbors on security. Jacob Simmons had recently built an extension to his house. This cost more money than he expected, as is usually the case, so he found himself cramped for funds.

He had not been in the factory long enough to draw any salary, and being forced to raise the money, he now came to Dr. Dutton to try and get it from him.

"What security can you give?" asked the doctor.

"I can give you my note," replied Mr. Simmons.

"With a mortgage?" suggested the doctor.

"No, I don't want to give a mortgage, but I have a certificate for two hundred dollars' worth of stock in the Central Valley Railroad;" taking a lot of papers from his pocket book.

"Let me see it."

"It is among some of these papers," Simmons replied, sorting them in his lap. "Ah, here it is."

"Yes, this will do," said the doctor, after examining it closely. "Nellie, hand me my note book," he added, turning to his daughter.

She quickly placed the book in her father's hand, and he filled out a note for Mr. Simmons to sign. When this had been done the money was paid over, and Jacob left the house, feeling quite elated at his success in raising the loan so easily.

Little did he think of the position in which he had placed himself through his careless handling of his papers, and of the trouble that would follow, not only to himself, but to others whom he had promised to shield.

Soon after he had gone, and the doctor had passed into another room, Nellie raised her eyes from the book she was reading and noticed a small piece of paper upon the floor near the chair where Mr. Simmons had sat.

She picked it up, and glancing at it hastily, saw it contained Fred Worthington's name.

She could not refrain from reading it through, and as she read she shuddered with fear at the thought of what might have been.

She hastened to her father and mother with the paper for them to read.

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed the doctor, although he now knew something of Matthew De Vere's character. "Where did you get this?"

"I found it on the floor near where Mr. Simmons sat," replied Nellie.

"He must have accidentally dropped it."

"Yes, but isn't it awful?"

"It is, indeed; but there seems little doubt of its being genuine, as here are the names signed to it. Is this Matthew's writing?"

"Yes, I think so. It looks exactly like it," replied Nellie.

"It was a bold act of villainy, and his father should know it," continued the doctor thoughtfully.

"I can't think Matthew is so bad as that shows," said Mrs. Dutton.

"Do you know the cause of their quarrel, Nellie?" asked her father.

She hesitated. The question was especially embarrassing to her.

"I think Matthew has some grudge against Fred," she replied, evading a direct answer.

"I should think he must have, and for what, I wonder?"

"Fred could tell you all about it, I think, if you would have him call this evening," said Nellie artfully, both to save further questioning and to have a pretext for inviting him to call. "He may know something about this paper."

"I think that would be the best plan," said Mrs. Dutton.

"Perhaps it would," answered her husband.

"I will write him a note, then, asking him to call this evening," ventured Nellie.

Her father nodded assent. This gave her a thrill of pleasure. At last she could invite Fred to call and could surprise him with the facts she had in her possession.

During the afternoon Fred received a neatly written note from Nellie, simply asking him to call that evening. It was so brief, and so entirely unexpected, he was puzzled to know what it meant. At any rate, he was delighted at the thought of seeing his friend once more, and in her own home, too—let her object be what it would.

He concluded, after much speculation, that it must be favorable, for he could not possibly imagine why she should want him to call if it were otherwise.

They had hardly met since the night of the party, when they parted company at her home after a most enjoyable evening. Then each felt more than an ordinary regard for the friendship of the other, and doubtless little imagined that it would be so suddenly broken in upon by the suspicious circumstances that speedily surrounded Fred. This, together with De Vere's efforts to establish himself in Nellie's good opinion, had separated them.

Among all the trials and misfortunes that had come upon him, Fred found this change in Nellie's manner touched him in a way that nothing else had done. Why this should be so, he was at a loss to know, for he had looked upon her simply as a friend.

And with Nellie, his absence for weeks, when she had seen him almost daily from childhood up, made her lonely. She wondered why she thought so often of him, and why she should have felt a sense of jealousy when he said Grace was a better friend to him than she, and again when she called and told with such evident pleasure of Fred's triumph at the trial.

There also were the beautiful flowers he had sent, from which she selected a delicate white rose, which she had worn upon her breast till it withered, and then had pressed it in a book and put it carefully away where it would be preserved.

All these thoughts occurred to her while she was sick at heart—all these, and many more, regarding Fred's kindness and agreeable manners. She thought of the party, of their delightful walk home after it was over, of the attention he had shown her and of the complimentary remark that she "had given him the pleasantest evening of his life."

Then she wondered why she should think of these things, "for he is nothing to me," she

tried to persuade herself; but the thoughts seemed too deeply impressed upon her mind to be driven away, and clinging as they did they made their influence felt.

Yes, she admitted to herself that Fred's society was much more agreeable to her than that of any of the other boys—but why? Well, she began to suspect the cause, and if you had been her trusted friend, the one to whom she told her secrets—if she ever did so foolish a thing—she might have said in confidence that—well, never mind what she would have said, for being yet but a girl of sixteen she could only have called him a *friend.*

"Good evening, Fred. I am very glad to see you," said Nellie, as she opened the door and he stepped in.

"I am glad to hear you say so, and I am sure this is an unexpected pleasure to me," replied Fred, taking her proffered hand, which he retained longer than perhaps was really necessary.

"I hope, then, you will not find the call a stupid one."

"Oh, I have no fear of that."

"You must not be too sure, Fred, for father has just been summoned to attend a patient, and mother has a caller, so you will have to put up with my entertainment for a while," replied Nellie, showing him into the library.

"That will be most agreeable to me," returned Fred, taking a seat not far from his hostess.

"I shall try and not offend you, for you are such a stranger."

"Yes, it seems an age since I have seen you, Nellie," replied our young friend in a way that convinced her he meant every word he said.

"Has it, really?"

"It has, indeed."

"I was afraid you had almost forgotten me."

"Oh, no; I could not do that easily."

"Well, Fred, I am sure the time could not have seemed longer to you than it has to me," replied Nellie, after a pause, and dropping her eyes as she realized the expression she had thrown into the remark.

Fred's heart beat quicker.

"Have you really missed me?" he asked, feeling happier than he had for weeks.

"If you doubt what I say, how can I convince you?"

"No, no, I don't doubt you now, Nellie."

"Why do you say now? Have you ever doubted my word?"

"No, I did not mean that."

"I hope you will explain, so I shall not feel uncomfortable."

Fred hesitated, hardly knowing how to reply.

"Nellie, it seems like the old days to meet you

again," he finally answered, "and I shrink from thinking of the past weeks when I could hardly help doubting nearly every one's friendship."

"I am so sorry for you, and I hope you will forgive me for not being more friendly," replied Nellie tenderly.

"I forgive you cheerfully, though I did feel hurt at the time."

"I saw that only too plainly by your letter, which brought me to my senses; but it was unkind in me to do as I did."

"No, not exactly unkind, as nearly every one supposed me guilty."

"But I ought not to have been so hasty, for there are always two sides to a question, and I did not wait to hear yours."

"You have not heard it yet, and still you overlook the charge made against me."

"Of course I do."

"But it has never been explained away."

"Oh, that was not what troubled me, but—well, nothing ought to have troubled me," answered Nellie, slightly confused.

"The intoxication she means," thought Fred, and the color rose to his face.

Nellie observed this, and was sorry she had said what she did.

"As I wrote you, I could have explained it fully to you. I know what you mean."

"I did not intend to refer to that unfortunate affair," said Nellie, with sympathy.

"It pains me to think of it, but I shall be glad to have you understand it."

"It was a great surprise to me, Fred, and being right here seemed awful, but since receiving your letter I have suspected Matthew De Vere might have had something to do with it."

"Have you thought so?"

"Yes; was I right?"

"Yes, Nellie, you were; but I did wrong in following him."

"Will you not tell me all about it?"

Fred went over the matter of his intoxication, and explained everything truthfully, while Nellie listened with interest and astonishment.

XXXI.

FRED'S story was a surprising revelation to Nellie Dutton, who now, for the first time, saw Matthew De Vere's conduct in its true light.

"How could he be so mean?" she exclaimed.

"It was his revenge," replied Fred.

"Why did you not speak of his treachery?"

"I thought it best not to till I could get proof of it, for if I had he would have denied it."

"He ought to have been punished."

"He will be in time, I think."

"I hope so; but that will not make up for all you have suffered. So he was the means of your losing your position in the store?"

"Yes."

"I will never speak to him again!" said Nellie indignantly. "He is too mean."

"I felt sure the time would come when you would say so," replied Fred.

The color came to Nellie's face.

"Yes?" she answered, after a pause.

Fred saw that she was slightly embarrassed, and knew she was thinking of the somewhat sarcastic letter he had sent her.

"Nellie, I hope you will forget my letter," he said.

"I should be glad to, if I could."

"I am sorry I sent it."

"I am sorry you had cause to send it."

"I was hasty; but it is past now. I hope you will not let it trouble you."

"If I will forget the letter, will you forget what caused you to send it?"

"I shall be only too glad to do so."

"Truly?"

"Here is my hand on it."

"Shall we now be as good friends as ever?" asked Nellie, as she withdrew her hand.

"I sincerely hope so, and—even better," he added hesitatingly.

Nellie's eyes dropped, and a sweet blush stole over her face.

"We were very good friends before, I thought," she answered.

"So we were, but—but—well, I shall prize your friendship more highly since learning how much I missed it."

Nellie now brought her fan into requisition.

"And you will never write me any more sarcastic letters?"

"No."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Dr. Dutton.

"Ah! good evening, Fred. I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long, but I hope Nellie has entertained you well."

Fred arose, blushed, and took the doctor's hand. Why he blushed he didn't know, but he could feel his cheeks burn.

"Oh, yes, I have been well entertained, thank you, but I didn't realize that I was waiting for you."

"Why, didn't Nellie tell you?"

"No, sir."

"I forgot to say you wanted to see him, we were so busy talking," put in Nellie.

"Oh, that's it; well, all right. But, Fred, I have been hearing good reports of you," the doctor continued.

"I am glad to know that, and I hope I merit them," replied Fred modestly.

"I think there is no doubt of it."

"It is refreshing to hear you say so after knowing all the bad reports that have been circulated against me during the last few weeks."

"Never mind, my boy; you have stood the fire nobly, and are surely winning the fight."

Fred's heart leaped with joy at these reassuring words from the doctor.

"Do you think so?" he said, at length.

"There is very little doubt of it, and I think I have a surprise for you," taking from his

pocket the paper Nellie had found and placing it in Fred's hands.

Our young hero quickly ran his eye over it, and was amazed at its contents. It read thus:

MAPLETON, November 17th, 187—.

Matthew De Vere and me was waitin' near the old Booker barn to club Fred Worthington. Matthew hired me to help him. We both had a club. 'Twas 'bout twelve o'clock in the night I gess. Matthew sed he was goin' to get square with Fred. Matthew told me to strike him on the leg, and he sed he would do the efecktive work and fix him so he wouldn't interfear with him any more. When you come along we darted on you thinking you was Fred. I hit you a hard clip on the leg. Matthew was reddy to strike you on the head, but saw his mistake and stopped jest in time and ran away.

(Signed) TIM SHORT.

The above statement is true.

MATTHEW DE VERE.

"Have you ever seen this paper before?" asked the doctor.

"No, sir, never."

"Knew nothing of it?"

"No, sir."

"You little realized, then, how near you came to being waylaid and——" but the doctor didn't finish the sentence.

"I never had the slightest suspicion of it."

"It was a bold plot."

"And a wicked one," added Mrs. Dutton, who had now joined the group in the library.

"But what kept you out so late that night?" asked the doctor.

Fred examined the date of Mr. Simmons' paper.

"It was the night of Grace Bernard's party."

"Yes, so it was—I remember the date now; but in going from Mr. Bernard's to your home you could not pass the old Booker barn."

Fred's face grew suddenly red. The temperature of the room seemed to him suffocatingly warm. He stood on one foot, embarrassed, trying to think how to explain.

His color very strangely seemed to be reflected upon Nellie's cheeks. Just then she appeared to be much interested in the evening paper, and held it much nearer to her eyes than was her custom.

"You shouldn't ask so many questions," said Mrs. Dutton to her husband, smiling at the young folks' embarrassment.

"Ah, ha! I see now. Jealousy, was it?"

"It looks like it," answered Fred comically, whereupon the doctor and his wife laughed heartily, and, the ice being broken, Nellie and Fred joined in the merriment, though it was at their own expense.

"Well," said the doctor seriously, "this paper records a very grave matter. The boys should be punished."

"Why, I wonder, didn't Mr. Simmons have them punished?" asked Nellie.

"The case looks suspicious," answered her father.

"He has never reported it, or we should have heard of it," said Mrs. Dutton.

Fred rested his head on his hand in deep thought.

"He must have had some object in getting this paper," he at length answered. "It looks to me as though he had been bribed—been paid to keep the matter a secret."

"That seems very probable," answered the doctor.

"Would Matthew's father have paid Mr. Simmons anything for such a purpose?"

"No, indeed. He would be the last man imaginable to allow himself to be fleeced in such a way."

"I thought so; but now, supposing our theory of the bribing is the correct one, how and where could the boys have got the money to pay him?"

"They couldn't have got it at home."

"Do you feel sure of that?"

"I am almost certain."

"Mr. Simmons could have brought a strong pressure to bear upon them."

"However strong, Mr. De Vere would never have paid one cent. But he would have punished Matthew unmercifully."

"You have never known of his being punished?"

"No."

"Would any one outside of the family probably have known it?"

"I think so."

A theory concerning this matter had suggested itself to Fred, and he was working it out like a young logician.

"Suppose," he continued, "Mr. Simmons should have forced the boys to do something toward paying him, and Matthew dare not speak to his father and mother about it, what would have been the result?"

"I can hardly imagine," returned the doctor.

"I think they would have got it from some other source by some other means," said Nellie.

Fred's face brightened. This was the answer that seemed natural to him, and he was pleased that Nellie should be the one to give it.

"That is my idea," he replied.

"Why, Fred, you talk exactly like a lawyer," remarked Mrs. Dutton.

"Oh, I don't know about that," he laughed, "but this paper has strengthened a suspicion that I have had for a little time—strengthened it so much that I feel almost convinced I am right since hearing what the doctor says about this matter."

XXXII.

"WHAT is your theory, Fred?" asked Dr. Dutton, with interest.

"I think I may as well take you all into my confidence," answered our hero.

"And why not?" replied the doctor.

"Of course you will, Fred," said Nellie.

"Yes, I think you can help me in working up the case."

"We will surely do all we can," said Dr. Dutton. "But what is the nature of your suspicion?"

"It is so grave a matter I hate to breathe it to any one till I have further proof, therefore I must ask you all to keep it strictly confidential."

"It shall be treated as such," replied Dr. Dutton.

"I think it probable," said Fred, "that John Rexford's store was robbed and burned, and it is not altogether impossible that it was done to raise this money for Mr. Simmons."

"Oh, that can't be so," returned the doctor, amazed at the thought.

"There are reasons that lead me to think so."

"And Matthew might have done it to try and injure you," put in Nellie, as she thought how far De Vere had carried his malice.

"That might be so," replied Fred, "but I reason from the belief that Matthew was forced to raise the money."

"Is that the only point on which you found your theory?" asked Dr. Dutton.

"No, sir. I thought something was wrong when Jacob Simmons first met me in the mill. He seemed fairly startled on seeing me. I decided then to keep my eyes open. In a few days I saw him use a peculiar knife—called a mechanic's pocket knife—which is in itself quite a kit of tools. I managed to have Jack Hickey borrow it so I could examine it. The minute I had it in my hands I recognized it as the very one that was in Mr. Rexford's show case when I left his store. It was an expensive knife, and I don't believe Simmons ever bought it.

"That is a good piece of evidence, surely," replied the doctor, "but can you get the knife when you need it?"

"I have bought it," and he explained his method of obtaining it. "Moreover," continued Fred, "I remember when I was tried for burning Mr. Rexford's store, Matthew and Tim were both present. They sat together and showed a very keen interest in the trial, and when it went

in my favor, their disappointment was plainly to be seen."

"Did it occur to you then that they possibly had anything to do with burning the store?"

"No, but knowing what I do now, it seems to me probable. This paper furnishes just the evidence I was waiting for."

"I admire your bold reasoning, Fred," said the physician.

"His theory seems plausible," added Mrs. Dutton, "though I can't believe Matthew would think of doing such an act."

Fred felt much pleased at the good impression he was evidently making upon Nellie's parents.

"I may be entirely wrong," he replied, "but I have sufficient confidence in the idea to feel warranted in testing the matter."

"I would advise you to do so," said the doctor.

Presently Fred arose to go, and after receiving a cordial invitation from the doctor and his wife to call often, and a cheerful good night from Nellie, he withdrew, happy over the warm welcome given him, and full of enthusiasm in his purpose to bring the guilty parties to justice.

He first went home and got the knife in question, and then made his way straight to Mr. Rexford's room, where he found him alone.

"Good evening, Mr. Rexford," said Fred heartily.

"Good evening," returned the merchant, wondering what the boy's object could be in calling.

This was the first time they had met alone to speak since the trouble at the store when Fred was discharged.

"I suppose you have learned nothing new relative to the cause of your store's burning," remarked our hero.

"No, nothing."

"You were not very generous with your old clerk to have him arrested, charged with such an act."

The merchant winced.

"I think I have a chance now to do you a favor in return for your generosity," continued Fred.

This sarcasm cut deeply, but there was something about the boy's manner that kept the merchant from answering angrily.

"What is it?" he at length asked.

"I have a clue that would perhaps lead to the arrest of the parties who plundered and burned your store."

Rexford's interest was now fully aroused.

"Have you?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes, and I have sufficient evidence, I think, to warrant you in making an arrest."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, there is no doubt of it."

Fred now took the knife from his pocket and passed it to his former employer.

The merchant recognized it instantly by its peculiar handle. He said, in answer to Fred's questions, that the knife had not been sold, and that it must have been taken from his show case the night of the fire. He remembered showing it that evening to a customer, and distinctly recollected putting it back into the show case.

This, then, constituted a strong piece of evidence to show that the store was robbed.

Fred then explained how the knife came into his possession.

"You have worked up the case skilfully," said Mr. Rexford.

"I hope I have made no mistakes," answered Fred.

"You have shown care and ingenuity, and have succeeded in getting very strong evidence. This is better than Sheriff Coombs has done."

"I have other evidence also in my possession that makes this much stronger," replied our hero, and he showed Mr. Rexford the paper that Nellie Dutton had found, and gave him his theory of the robbery.

"I agree with you fully. It looks very reasonable," said the merchant, whose enthusiasm was well aroused. "I can hardly wait till morning before taking action in the matter."

XXXIII.

MR. REXFORD was very grateful to our young friend for the trouble he had taken in working up this case.

"It hardly seems possible, Fred, that you should do so much for me, after being treated as you were by me," he said warmly.

"I hope I have been able to do you a favor," returned Fred sincerely; "and besides, it may prove of service to me."

"You have, indeed, done me a favor. And is this the way you seek revenge?"

"I think it is the best sort of revenge."

"I believe you, Fred; but very few ever practise it."

"It is more satisfactory in the end, and moreover is right."

"Very true, but it is hard to act upon such a theory. Suppose Simmons is guilty, should I forgive him and do him a kindness?"

"That would be quite a different case. His act would be crime, and should, therefore, be punished. You could feel sorry for him, though, that he had acted so unwisely."

"Yes, I think you are right," answered the merchant mechanically, while his mind seemed to be struggling with another problem.

"Fred, I have wronged you cruelly," he continued, "and your generous spirit has touched me as nothing else has since I was a boy like yourself. I discharged you, practically accusing you of dishonesty, but now I know you were innocent. Your reputation was so injured that you could get no position in a store, and were obliged to seek employment in the factory. Then I had you arrested, charged with the grave offense of burning my store. Can you forgive me, Fred, for having wronged you so?"

"I can and will do so cheerfully," answered our hero, "for I believe you acted from your honest belief at the time."

"Yes, I did, but I should have had more charity, and more consideration for your welfare."

"It was a hard blow to me, I assure you. But tell me, have you found the missing money?" asked Fred eagerly.

"Yes. It was not lost; and the amount—eighteen dollars—was right. The error was in making change. It was my own mistake. An eccentric old fellow, a farmer up in Martintown, had the money—the very same twenty dollar bill. He said he gave me a five dollar bill and I handed back the twenty dollar bill in change."

"Farmers usually count their change very carefully."

"Yes, and it seems he counted this after he got home. He said he put the bill by itself in his wallet to keep until he had occasion to come this way again."

"When did you learn about it?"

"Two or three weeks ago."

"And you have known it all this time and said nothing about it?"

"Yes, Fred. Almost every day I have decided to send for you and explain all as I am doing now, but I dreaded meeting you and kept putting it off from day to day. I felt so guilty over my treatment of you, and so humiliated when I found the error was my own, that I had not the courage to tell you about it. Yet I knew all the time that I was adding more and more to the wrong I had done you."

"I can imagine how you feel about it," said Fred, "and your apology makes it all right. If the old farmer had returned the money earlier, much of this trouble might have been saved. He ought to have written you about it at any rate. It was fortunate he was an honest man; otherwise we should never have solved the mystery, and the stain would have clung to me always."

"Yes, Fred, I am afraid it would. But all suspicion is removed from you now. This shows

of what vital importance honesty, even in small matters, may prove to an individual."

"I can realize that now, as it applies so forcibly to my own case."

"I hope to make amends for some of the great wrong I have done you," said Mr. Rexford, whose heart seemed to show a tender side which it had not appeared hitherto to possess. "My store will be rebuilt within a few weeks, and you shall have your old position as clerk again, if you wish."

"You are very kind, Mr. Rexford. I am glad to know that I may work for you again. If I come I will let you know in time."

"The position is due you, and I never had a clerk who did his work so well. I hope you will decide to come with me," said the merchant, as Fred rose to go.

XXXIV.

EARLY the following morning Mr. Rexford called upon his lawyer, Mr. Ham. In due time the papers were made out and placed in the hands of Sheriff Coombs, who promptly made his way to the factory with all his official bearing and arrested Jacob Simmons on the charge of robbing and burning John Rexford's store.

Mr. Farrington was prepared for this move, as Fred had informed him that it would take place during the forenoon, and had also told him everything he had done, and what he proposed doing.

He was especially glad to learn that the missing money had been returned. His own theory was that some error had been made, but other events had followed so fast one upon the other that he had recently made little effort to solve the mystery.

That it should now be cleared up so satisfactorily, with all blame removed from Fred, was gratifying to him in the extreme, for he was a true and sincere friend of our young hero.

Mr. Simmons' surprise at seeing officer Coombs on such an errand can hardly be imagined. Of

course he had to give himself up and go with the sheriff—a prisoner charged with a grave offense.

A hearing in his case was arranged for the following day to come before Judge Plummer.

Mr. Simmons gave bonds for his appearance at the trial, and devoted the rest of the day to preparing his defense with his lawyer. Wondering why he had been arrested, and going over in his own mind every possible cause that could lead to it, he thought of the statement which Tim and Matthew had signed about the assault. He took his pocketbook from his coat, and looked among his papers for it.

It was not there. He was alarmed to find it missing. He asked his wife about it, but she knew nothing of it.

"I must have lost it somewhere," he admitted to himself with a shudder. "Fool that I was for doing wrong. I believe it has led to my arrest, but why I cannot understand."

When Matthew learned that Jacob Simmons had commenced work on the flockers with Fred he was alarmed. He talked the matter over with Tim. Both felt uneasy and unhappy, but they could see no way to help the case, so left it to fate, which speedily did its work.

Revenge to Matthew was a sad failure—had almost ruined him. Every effort he had made had recoiled upon him so unexpectedly and per-

sistently that now he was beset on all sides with danger of exposure and punishment.

Fred—his rival—had stood up manfully under fire without flinching. He had won at every point and was now fast regaining his old position.

"His friendship, too, with Nellie Dutton is re-established, and I can do no more to prevent it," sighed Matthew regretfully. "I met her this morning and she would not speak to me, but she entertained Fred all last evening."

While thus meditating, the report that Jacob Simmons had been arrested for burning Mr. Rexford's store reached Matthew. He hurried home and to his room, and there threw himself upon his bed and wept bitterly. Disappointment, disgrace, and humiliation all crowded upon him, and the inevitable step that he must take stared him cruelly in the face.

His heart beat with bitter anguish as he thought of all this—of his good home, of his father's pride in him and of his mother's love, of his sister's tender affection—thought of all those near and dear to him—and shuddered as he realized the disappointment and sorrow that was to fall heavily upon them from his own wicked acts.

He buried his face in his pillow and sobbed till it seemed that his heart would break.

"Oh, if I could only undo the past!" he cried. But he had gone too far.too far.

His pride and haughty spirit were completely crushed, and when he finally arose from his bed he was humbled indeed.

The following morning all Mapleton was excited by the report that Matthew De Vere could not be found.

He had not been seen by any one since the previous afternoon. Just where he was last seen was a mystery. One said he saw him coming from the pine grove with Tim Short about dusk; others tried to convince themselves and their friends that they had met him in this place or that, while a vague report stated that he was last seen by the river bank passing hurriedly from view in the darkness.

This was a sensational rumor. Was he drowned? Had he committed suicide? If so, why? Every one discussed the case—speculated upon it. None thought exactly alike, and each labored to persuade the other that his theory was the correct one.

Matthew's parents and sister were heartbroken. They knew nothing of his whereabouts, save that they believed he was safe, for they found a note in his room saying simply that he was forced to leave town immediately; that he could not then explain why, and that they would soon know all. He begged them not to worry about him, and humbly asked their forgiveness.

When Mr. Rexford heard that Matthew De Vere was missing, he immediately had Tim Short arrested, charged with robbing and burning his store.

Sheriff Coombs served the papers upon Tim, who had not as yet learned the news about Matthew.

When the sheriff spoke to him he was too badly frightened to reply.

"I shall have to take you with me," said the officer; "no way out of it now. The law ain't tender hearted with fellers that rob and burn. Besides, that De Vere boy has run away."

Tim staggered and fell to the ground. He had fainted dead away. When he regained consciousness his first words were:

"And now Matthew De Vere has run away and left me when he was the cause of it all." Great tears rolled down his cheeks and he sobbed bitterly.

Even the sheriff's heart was touched, and his official bearing relaxed as the boy's mother, almost prostrate with grief, implored him to let Tim go.

"Your son practically acknowledges his guilt," said the sheriff. "In any case, I should be compelled as an officer to arrest him, since the papers were placed in my hands. Still I think if he were to turn State's evidence—that is, to tell of his

own free will all the facts connected with the affair—the court would probably deal more leniently with him."

Tim brightened up considerably at this remark, which seemed to hold out a means of escape.

"I will tell the court all I know—everything from first to last," said he as he marched off with the sheriff.

The case excited so much interest that the court room was filled to overflowing. Among those present was Matthew's father, who wished to know the facts about his son's connection with the robbery. Dr. Dutton, Mr. Farrington, and Fred Worthington were also present. Yes, another was there—little Carl, pale and thin from his sickness, but alive with interest in what he expected to be Fred's great triumph.

When the court was ready for the trial, Mr. Ham, on the part of the prosecution, called Tim Short as the first witness, much to the surprise of Jacob Simmons and his lawyer.

"Do you know anything about John Rexford's store being robbed and burned?" asked Mr. Ham of Tim.

"I do," said the latter.

"Tell us all you know about it."

Tim hesitated a moment, hardly knowing how to commence the confession of such a serious crime.

"Did you have any direct connection with it?" asked attorney Ham, by way of assisting the boy.

"Yes, sir," answered Tim.

"What did you do?"

"I helped rob the store, and then we set fire to it."

"Who was with you?"

"Matthew De Vere was with me."

"Who else?"

"No one."

"Did Jacob Simmons have anything to do with the robbery?"

"No, not exactly."

"What do you mean by 'not exactly'?"

"I mean he wasn't there and didn't do it, but if it hadn't been for him we shouldn't have thought of robbing Mr. Rexford's store or had any trouble."

"Then he planned the robbery for you?"

"No."

"What was his connection with it, then?"

"He threatened to have us arrested if we didn't pay him three hundred dollars."

Tim here explained why Simmons demanded the money—told how Matthew came to the saloon for him, how they lay in wait for Fred, and the mistake they made in supposing Jacob Simmons to be the latter.

"And he demanded this three hundred dollars as a reward for secrecy?" asked the judge.

"Yes, sir," replied Tim.

Jacob Simmons' face was scarlet. Every one looked at him contemptuously, while he had to endure the cutting glances without a shield.

Right here Mr. Ham read the paper that Nellie Dutton had found, as evidence to substantiate Tim's statement.

"Why did Matthew De Vere wish to waylay Fred Worthington?" asked Judge Plummer thoughtfully, as if to get at the bottom of the facts.

"He said he wanted to get square with him."

"Is that all?"

"That and to teach him not to interfere with him."

"How had Fred interfered with him?"

"I don't know that, but I am sure Matthew did everything he could to injure him."

"Did he do more than attempt to waylay him?"

"Yes, he played friendship with Fred and got the bartender to drug him, and that was what made him drunk that time when everybody talked about him."

Now every one looked at Fred, but these were congratulatory glances, with a bit of hero worship about them.

Mr. Farrington and Dr. Dutton, who sat near Fred, leaned over and congratulated him with a warm grasp of the hand.

Every cloud that had hovered over our young friend was now swept away—every mystery was at last explained, and he stood triumphant over all opponents, the hero of the village—much stronger and far more popular than if he had never been *under fire*. He was tried and not found wanting in the qualities that go to make a strong man with a noble character.

In answer to further questions of the judge, Tim stated that they knew of no legitimate way to raise the money, as Matthew did not dare speak to his father about it; that they were forced to do something, believing Jacob Simmons would have them arrested if they failed to produce the amount demanded.

He further stated that Matthew and he were driven almost crazy by these repeated demands from Simmons, and committed the robbery without realizing what they were doing.

They burned the store, he said, to cover their theft. All the money found he claimed was given to Mr. Simmons, together with some articles that would not excite suspicion. Among the latter was the knife Fred discovered in Jacob's possession, and which led to the detection of the guilty parties.

"Did you give Jacob Simmons all the goods you took from the store?" asked the judge.

"No, sir. We were afraid he would suspect us, so we gave him only a few things besides the money," answered Tim. "We hid the other things in the pine grove."

"Are they there yet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you didn't make up the full three hundred dollars for Jacob Simmons?"

"No; but Matthew promised to pay him the balance, so he agreed to do nothing further."

It could not be shown that Jacob Simmons had directly incited the boys to commit the robbery, though he was unquestionably the cause of it. Neither could it be proved that he had knowingly received stolen goods.

The narrative of the legal proceedings would be entirely out of the design of this story. I will therefore state merely the final results.

In view of the fact that Tim Short confessed his guilt, and that he was the tool of Matthew De Vere, he was saved from going to prison, and was sent instead to serve three years in the State reform school, where he was compelled to learn a trade, and to conform to a rigid disciplinary system.

Jacob Simmons was found guilty of blackmail, and was sentenced to one year at hard labor in

the State prison, in addition to a fine of three hundred dollars.

But where was Matthew De Vere all this time?

Among those who congratulated Fred, none did so with more sincerity than did Nellie Dutton, and the flattering remarks made about him by the entire village were very gratifying to her.

As she and Fred talked over the trying events of the preceding months, she remarked that she had learned to esteem him more highly than ever.

"To hear you say that, Nellie," said he gratefully, "more than repays me for all I have suffered from Matthew De Vere's malice."

"I am glad, then, that we are such good friends," said Nellie thoughtfully.

"Yes, even better than in the old days, are we not?" said Fred, almost affectionately.

"We know each other better, I think," answered Nellie. Then she went to the piano, and, playing her own accompaniment, she sang with unusual effect one of Fred's favorite songs.

A few days after the trial Fred received a note from Mr. De Vere, asking him to come to the bank. Obtaining permission to leave the mill Fred started off. He found the bank president looking worn and anxious. Mr. De Vere greeted him kindly, and said:

"Fred, I have sent for you to offer you a position. Would you like to become a banker?"

Fred was thoroughly surprised at such a proposition. "I can hardly realize that such an opportunity is before me," he said. "I thank you sincerely, Mr. De Vere, but I can't understand why you should offer it to me when there are so many others better fitted for it."

"There are two reasons, my boy. First, I owe you some recompense for all the injury and injustice Matthew has done you. I cannot believe he foresaw all that would follow his first petty revenge, but was forced on, step by step, by a wicked man. But the injury to you was the same, and my wife and daughter join me in feeling that we owe you this reparation."

"Do not think of such a thing, Mr. De Vere. You are not responsible, and I would not think of accepting a position on that account."

Mr. De Vere handed Fred a letter.

"Read this," he said.

The letter was from Matthew, headed "Chicago." It contained a full confession of his crime, and gave all the circumstances that led up to it. He begged his parents and sister to forgive him. Upon this point he said:

Oh, if you only knew what I have suffered, and am still suffering, on account of my foolish and wicked acts, I think you would have charity for me.

How I would like to see you all—my dear home, and my own pretty room. If only I could fall on my knees before you and mother, and with true penitent tears wipe out the

past, how gladly I would do so. But this, I realize, is forbidden me. I have forfeited my home, my parents, my reputation, my native State even, and all to gratify a petty grudge. I wish you would see Fred Worthington and tell him how I have wronged him, and ask him if he can forgive me. He has won the contest while I am ruined—ruined so far as my old life goes—but now, my dear father and mother, I have commenced a new career.

I have told Cousin Henry everything about the past and he has helped me plan for the future. He has furnished me some money and I shall start tomorrow for one of the Territories, where I shall commence life for myself.

I shall work and be a man in all that is honorable and right. I feel ten years older than I did a few months ago. I have taken some books with me to study.

The first money I earn shall go to Mr. Rexford, in payment for his loss by my hands. He shall lose nothing if I live long enough to earn the money due him. I wish you would protect Tim Short so far as possible. I alone am responsible for his connection with the robbery.

In writing to me, if I may so far expect your forgiveness, please address me in care of Cousin Henry and he will forward to me. I will write to you as soon as I get located, and tell you all my plans.

After writing at some length upon family matters, Matthew closed his letter by again appealing to his parents and sister for forgiveness, and by assuring them of his love.

Fred returned the letter to Mr. De Vere, feeling deeply touched and profoundly sorry for Matthew.

"Tell him," said he, "that he has my forgiveness in full, and that I wish him prosperity in his new life."

"Thank you, Fred, for your generosity. He

is my boy still, and is dear to me, though he has done wrong. But," he continued, with moist eyes, "he is lost to me now—lost so far as all my plans for his future went; and now, Fred, I want you to take his place. I had designed to put him into the bank next year, and to give him a thorough training; but as he has gone and cannot return, I want you to take the position."

"I thank you sincerely for this offer, Mr. De Vere. I should certainly like such a position, but the fear that you offer it to me as a recompense causes me to hesitate about accepting it."

"Do not hesitate on that ground, my boy. I have heard from Dr. Dutton, one of our directors, from Mr. Rexford and others, that you are in all respects better qualified for the position than any other young man in town. The salary for the first year will be five hundred. After that you will be advanced. Will you accept?"

"Yes, I will accept, with many, many thanks," replied Fred gratefully.

He immediately returned to the factory and told Mr. Farrington of his good fortune. The latter congratulated him, "and yet," said he, "I am rather sorry, for I had designed to take you up to this department and teach you the entire business; however, I will gladly let you go, believing as I do that your new position is an exceptionally fine one for a boy of your age."

"I thank you a thousand times, Mr. Farrington, for your willingness to let me off and for all your kindness to me. Now I know the value of a good friend. If it had not been for your kindness and assistance, when none spoke well of me, I might not have established my innocence. As it is, through your help I have gained everything."

On leaving Mr. Farrington, Fred went to Mr. Rexford and told him he should be obliged to give up the idea of taking his old position as clerk, and after explaining why, told him he wanted him to do him a favor by giving little Carl a position in his store at a fair salary, and to arrange his duties so that he would have only light work to do.

The merchant agreed to do this. In fact, he would have done almost anything for Fred, for he felt under many obligations to him.

Fred was very happy over the bright prospects for his little crippled friend, as it had been his own privilege to help him.

Fred's promotion to the bank created a sensation in the village, and he was looked upon as the luckiest person in town. It is safe to believe that Nellie Dutton rejoiced in Fred's good fortune far more than she was willing for any one to suspect. As time rolled on they were often seen together, and seemed like brother and sister.

That they were happy in each other's society there could be no doubt. Her influence upon him refined his manners and elevated his tastes, while associating with him was quite as beneficial to her in gaining broader ideas and contracting the habit of thinking and reasoning after the fashion of men.

The last time I saw them was on a beautiful evening in June. Dave Farrington and I were returning home from a trouting expedition. We were upon an elevated plain, where we could survey the surrounding country. Nature seemed at her best, and this was one of her choicest scenes. The rich green stretching everywhere before the eye was only broken by the white and pink blossoms of fruit trees and shrubbery. The sun was sinking behind a distant mountain which threw its shadow upon the landscape about us, and rich, golden hues spread out over the entire western horizon.

"A charming scene," remarked Dave, with true admiration.

"It is indeed," said I; "but here is beauty far more attractive."

Dave turned, and beholding Fred and Nellie close upon us, replied:

"You are right. I never saw her look so pretty."

They were taking an evening drive with a

handsome bay horse and high carriage. The top was tipped back, and they appeared to be enjoying the scene that had engrossed our own attention.

Nellie was clad in a light summer dress, with a pale blue sash which matched the trimming of her jaunty hat. Never until then had I realized that she was so handsome. With fair complexion and glowing cheeks, she presented a picture for an old master, as she talked and laughed merrily.

We raised our hats as they passed by, and soon they were beyond our view.

"Dave," said I, "there is a glimpse of what life should be. It is a sweet picture. Why, I wonder, do boys go to destruction by visiting iniquitous dens, by keeping low and vulgar company, by drinking, smoking, and gambling, when they might follow Fred's example, and be as refined, respected, and supremely happy as he now seems to be?"

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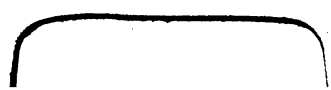
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